

A TALE OF TWO PORT CITIES: CONTRABAND TRADE, THE
ASIENTO CONTRACT, AND CONFLICT IN THE
EARLY MODERN CARIBBEAN

by
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STATEMENT OF THESIS APPROVAL

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ABSTRACT

The long and lucrative history of smuggling in the early modern period receives the attention of colonial scholars only as it relates to their isolated geographic field of study, ignoring the broader history that linked imperial economies in a mercantilist age. This thesis addresses the history of eighteenth-century smuggling in the Caribbean by examining both British and Spanish sources in order to shift the angle of focus away from imperial metanarratives and towards an understanding of the commercial networks forged between Spanish and British colonists on the periphery of empire. By examining the contraband trade between Jamaican merchants and residents of Cartagena, this work explores the blurred lines of colonial jurisprudence as well as the commercial networks necessary to the survival of those colonial spheres.

These interimperial commercial relations brought together a diverse group of actors who defied the mercantilist ambitions of their respective monarchies. This thesis exposes the conflicts and compromises that arose in the colonies in order to facilitate economic survival and success. The Spanish residents of Cartagena, due to the erratic arrival of the galleon fleet in the eighteenth century, depended on Jamaican merchants for their most basic necessities. For their part, Jamaican interlopers used the licit slave trade of the *asiento* contract in order to flood the Spanish port cities with British manufactured goods, thereby stimulating the economy of their own island. Despite the many conflicts that erupted between the maritime powers of the eighteenth century, the illicit flow of

goods through circum-Caribbean ports linked geographically distant parts of the world in a global economy that survived and flourished despite imperial mandates ordering its cessation.

For Ben, who showed me that imagination is everything.

And for Harry, because every good love story involves a sidekick.

Thank you both.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	vii
PROLOGUE: THE CUTLASS IS RAISED.....	1
INTRODUCTION.....	4
CHAPTERS	
ONE: THE ASIENTO CONTRACT IN JAMAICA: IMPERIAL DESIRES AND COLONIAL REALITIES	9
TWO: THE ASIENTO CONTRACT IN CARTAGENA: IMPERIAL DESIRES AND COLONIAL REALITIES.....	29
THREE: BRIBERY, HERESY, AND MURDER: TENSIONS ESCALATE.....	48
FOUR: THE EAR COMES OFF	64
CONCLUSION	74
BIBLIOGRAPHY	76

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PROLOGUE

THE CUTLASS IS RAISED

Tales of dramatic encounters on the high seas abound in the historical literature of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Yet, perhaps no meeting between two foreign captains elicited quite as resounding a response as that between Master Robert Jenkins and Captain Juan de León Fandiño when their ships met in the crystal blue waters of the Caribbean Sea on April 9, 1731. One captain would leave the scene to achieve some amount of fame in the defense of San Augustine's Castillo de San Marcos, while the other would arrive home and be presented before Parliament, becoming famous only for his ear inciting enough outrage to push even the pacifist Robert Walpole to assent to the need for war against Spain. The ensuing conflict, while lost in historical obscurity next to the more dramatic conflicts of the later eighteenth century, began a series of wars between Great Britain and France, with Spain as both an ally and occasional observer, which would cost both crowns their North American empires.¹ And, yet, when Fandiño brandished his cutlass onboard the *Rebecca*, neither man could foresee the events that one swift move of a blade could set in motion.

Under orders from the Spanish crown in an anachronistic reversion to coastal defense via privateering, Captain Fandiño and his crew sailed that day in search of

¹ Harold V.W. Temperley, "The Causes of the War of Jenkins' Ear, 1739," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 3rd Ser., 3 (1909): 198.

contraband smugglers operating too close to Spanish-held possessions. The bright Union Jack would have flown over the deck of the brig, *Rebecca*, just off of the coast of Havana as Fandiño maneuvered his vessel alongside that of Master Jenkins. The probability of the *Rebecca* sailing under the asiento contract meant that Fandiño started with the formalities of asking for Jenkins' paperwork. Unfortunately for the British seaman, while the ship's papers called for a voyage from Jamaica to London, Fandiño found it far too off course to be ignored. A further examination of the ship revealed it stocked full of both fresh provisions and Spanish gold, ostensibly the result of a smuggling venture recently completed in the Spanish port city of Havana.² Fandiño had caught a prize.

Despite the obvious illegality of Jenkins' presence off the coast of Havana with a hold full of products of the island, a dispute erupted between the two men. Perhaps the dispute was merely personal, perhaps Jenkins was assured of his own legitimacy despite the contents of his hold, or perhaps Fandiño was simply incensed at the British captain's blatant disregard for mercantile legislation. While it is impossible to discern exactly what happened onboard the *Rebecca*, one part of the fight has survived in the historical record – the severing of Jenkins' ear. Fandiño cut off Jenkins' ear and allegedly told him, “‘Take this to your king and tell him if he were here I would do the same to him.’ Then after relieving the *Rebecca* of her gold, and a goodly part of her provisions, Fandiño released her.”³

The severing of Jenkins' ear, while dramatic in a purely anecdotal way, did not initially stir the passions of Parliament to war. In fact, Jenkins did not appear before Parliament until 1738 to attest to the abuse he suffered at the hands of the Spanish –

² Edward W. Lawson. “What Became of the Man Who Cut Off Jenkins' Ear,” *The Florida Historical Quarterly* 37, No.1 (July 1958): 34.

³ *Ibid.*, 34.

allegedly accompanied by his ear pickled in a jar.⁴ Seven years after his fateful encounter with Captain Fandiño, Jenkins was presented before Parliament merely as an example of the many abuses perpetrated by the Spanish against British merchants, prejudicing both the safety of British citizens as well as the lucrative trade, licit and otherwise, which enriched Britain's merchants on either side of the Atlantic. For the Spanish, who vehemently denied contributing to Jenkins' one-eared state, it was the British who were abusing Spanish trade prerogatives. Contraband trade in the Spanish Caribbean and Mainland ran rampant, carried in large part by ships bearing British registry papers. If Fandiño acted in an overly aggressive manner, it was largely due to the state of siege under which the Spanish crown viewed their American possessions. Oddly, a mere twenty-five years before Jenkins and his ear testified before Parliament, Spain and Great Britain signed a treaty which granted Britain certain trade rights in Spanish America under the auspices of the *asiento* contract. Whether either power recognized then the possibility of mutual abuses, the events leading up to and following Jenkins and Fandiño's encounter would have lasting repercussions throughout the Atlantic World.

⁴ Harold V.W. Temperley, "The Causes of the War of Jenkins' Ear, 1739," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 3rd Ser., 3 (1909):210.

INTRODUCTION

The vastness of the Americas confounds attempts at synthesis. From Columbus, who mistakenly placed the Americas as an appendage to Asia, to modern historical works that avoid conceiving of American history as hemispheric, conceptions of the region remain fragmented. For historians of the colonial era, the boundaries of modern nation-states or linguistic regions serve to delineate where one history begins and another falls into obscurity. In the past three decades, the Caribbean has become increasingly more important in the historiography of the British Empire.¹ These scholars focus their works on connecting the British Caribbean with the wider empire – correcting the traditional tendency to only pay attention in the historiography to the thirteen seaboard colonies which would become the United States of America. While this upsurge in scholarship on the British Caribbean fills a necessary gap in the scholarship, few of them connect the British islands with the polyglot circum-Caribbean. Spanish American historians, additionally, have moved more and more towards focusing on the Spanish Caribbean.²

¹ A few of those works include: Vincent Brown, *The Reaper's Garden: Death and Power in the World of Atlantic Slavery* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 2008), Richard S. Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves: The Rise of the Planter Class in the English West Indies, 1624-1713* (University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 1972), Russell R. Menard, *Sweet Negotiations: Sugar, Slavery, and Plantation Agriculture in Early Barbados* (University of Virginia Press, Charlottesville, 2006), Stuart B. Schwartz, *Tropical Babels: Sugar and the Making of the Atlantic World, 1450-1680* (University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 2006), Trevor G. Bernard, *Mastery, Tyranny, and Desire: Thomas Thistlewood and his Slaves in the Anglo-Jamaican World* (University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 2004), and John J. McCusker and Kenneth Morgan, *The Early Modern Atlantic Economy* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge & New York, 2000).

² Some of this scholarship includes: Stuart B. Schwartz, *Tropical Babels: Sugar and the Making of the Atlantic World, 1450-1680* (University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 2006), Herbert S. Klein, *African Slavery in Latin America and the Caribbean* (Oxford University Press, New York, 1986), J.H. Elliott, *Empires of the Atlantic World: Britain and Spain in America, 1492-1830* (Yale University Press,

Yet, as with their counterparts in British Caribbean historiography, few works on the Spanish American side traverse imperial boundaries.³

The eighteenth-century Caribbean exemplifies the gap between colonial historiographies of the Americas and the realities of that colonial period. Despite the differences between the colonial projects of the British and Spanish empires, the Caribbean demonstrates the effect of “intractable local conditions which might well impose themselves to the extent of demanding from the colonists responses that differed markedly from metropolitan norms.”⁴ Those responses which posited colonies’ interests in opposition to imperial desires, moreover, oftentimes resulted in individual imperial subjects acting in each other’s own shared interests. Instances of colonists working in concert with one another in defiance of metropolitan mandates, however, are generally overlooked by historians whose focus rarely exceeds the boundaries of their specific empire or region. In the Caribbean, however, that type of oversight becomes increasingly difficult as eighteenth-century trade networks wove throughout the territories of the British and Spanish empires precisely because of the local conditions which necessitated those commercial relationships.

By examining contraband trade networks and the local conditions which necessitated them, this work explores the common history of Spanish and British colonists in the Caribbean. The specific aim, however, is just not to trace the trade

New Haven & London, 2006), Felipe Fernandez Armesto, *The Americas: A Hemispheric History* (Modern Library Editions, New York, 2003), or Richard Pares, *War and Trade in the West Indies, 1739-1763* (Thomas Nelson Printers, Ltd. London, 1963).

³ Both historiographies contain works that traverse imperial boundaries due to the nature of their themes. One of the most obvious examples of this is the topic of piracy in which works like Kris Lane’s *Pillaging the Empire: Piracy in the Americas: 1500-1750* (M.E. Sharpe Inc., New York & London 1998) necessarily includes multiple empires due to the peripatetic nature of his book’s subject.

⁴ J.H. Elliott, *Empires of the Atlantic World: Britain and Spain in America, 1492-1830* (Yale University Press, New Haven & London, 2006): xiv.

networks that linked the port cities of Kingston, Jamaica with Cartagena de Indias in the eighteenth century. Instead, the subsequent chapters will explore the ways in which local conditions shaped similar circumstances on the ground that resulted in the steady increase of contraband trade between the two ports – a trade which defied all imperial mandates ordering its cessation. While the subject of contraband trade as a result of British possession of the *asiento de negroes* contract appears often in the historical literature of both empires, those works invariably focus on the experience of either the British or the Spanish. Axiomatic of most economic history, “The researcher, like the export merchant, stands on the dock waving goodbye without examining what happens to his shipment afterward, or even wondering why there was a market for it in the first place.”⁵ This work plunges into that divide and explores not just how eighteenth-century contraband trade functioned in a specific region but, more importantly, why.

The British Empire’s participation in the transatlantic slave trade necessarily draws the Caribbean islands of Jamaica and Barbados into increased historiographic light.⁶ The role of the South Sea Company in furnishing slaves for Spanish America, specifically, occupies the pages of several important works.⁷ Such narratives, however, rarely consider the relationship between the desires of the South Sea Company and the interests of the residents of Jamaica whose livelihood depended both on contraband trade with Spanish America and ready access to the African slaves for the island’s sugar

⁵ Zephyr Frank, Carlos Marichal, and Steven Topik eds. *From Silver to Cocaine: Latin American Commodity Chains and the Building of the World Economy, 1500-2000* (Duke University Press, Durham & London, 2006): 9.

⁶ For a good survey text on the British involvement in the transatlantic slave trade see: Kenneth Morgan, *The British Transatlantic Slave Trade* (Pickering & Chatto, London 2003).

⁷ Specifically, Colin Palmer’s *Human Cargoes: The British Slave Trade to Spanish America, 1700-1739* discusses the British slave trade during the period of the *asiento* contract.

plantations. Additionally, traditional works regarding the South Sea Company's involvement in contraband trade with Spanish America largely describe Spanish officials' "venality" as the reason for the continuance of the trade without examining the particular local conditions in parts of Spanish America which necessitated that trade, nor the equally as "venal" actions of South Sea Company employees who profited from Caribbean contraband. I seek to place the actions of Jamaican interlopers, South Sea Company merchants, and wealthy Jamaican planters in the context of local Caribbean conditions which encouraged and supported the transimperial contraband trade.

While local Jamaican interests contradicted the interests of the South Sea Company, the same could be said about the interests of residents of Cartagena de Indias and the Bourbon monarchs. The port city lacked regular access to legal Spanish trade goods while enjoying an abundance of gold and gold dust arriving from the interior.⁸ With Jamaican merchants and interlopers eager for access to gold, contraband trade between the two regions developed its own internal logic which defied the reforming and centralizing ambitions of the newly crowned Bourbon monarchy. Despite the logic behind the contraband trade, even historians of Spanish America tend to discuss the trade in terms of official corruption without examining the obvious economic necessity of that trade.⁹

While relying on such secondary source material, by considering local conditions as the main impetus for the contraband trade, this work will avoid the deeply imbedded stereotypes that tend to obscure and overwhelm this complicated history. Contraband trade in the eighteenth-century Caribbean illuminates the intertwined history of imperial

⁸ José Antonio Ocampo, *Historia Económica de Colombia* (Siglo Veintiuno Editores, Mexico City, 1987).

⁹ Lance Grahn's *The Political Economy of Smuggling* treats the contraband trade of New Granada in this light.

subjects which is oftentimes neglected in traditional nation-state narratives. Despite the prevalence of works which perpetuate stereotypical assumptions, “we inhabit an era in which integrative efforts are once again coming to the fore. Continental, Atlantic, and hemispheric approaches offer conceptual schemes intended to make sense of the Americas (or large regions of them) as a whole” and, to which, my work aims to contribute.¹⁰

¹⁰ Eric Hinderaker and Rebecca Horn. “Territorial Crossings: Histories and Historiographies of the Early Americas” *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 67, No. 3 (July 2010): 398.

CHAPTER ONE

THE ASIENTO CONTRACT IN JAMAICA: IMPERIAL DESIRES AND COLONIAL REALITIES

From the Treaty of Tordesillas, promulgated in 1492, until the mid-seventeenth century, the Spanish crown maintained a relatively successful stranglehold on transatlantic shipping. The discovery and conquest of the gold- and silver-rich Aztec and Inca empires brought immense wealth to the Spanish throne along with the acute attention of its European rivals. As such, the first incursions of northern European nations into the Americas revolved around the search for precious metals to mine or Spanish ships to plunder.¹ Despite the disparate long-term outcomes of European colonial projects in the Americas, the Spanish experience was the one most sought after initially by Britain, France, Portugal, and the Netherlands – who all continued to encroach upon American territory despite Spain's claim of legitimate sovereignty.

The British experience, rather than mirroring that of the Spanish, became one of tenuous settlement in challenging terrain. The fact that neither the French nor the Dutch fared much better in discovering vast deposits of mineral wealth in the Americas indicated rather clearly that the Spanish experience was exceptional. Without access to

¹ A great summary of this phenomenon can be found in Anthony Pagden's *Lords of All the World: Ideologies of Empire in Spain, Britain and France C. 1500-C. 1800* (New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press, 1995).

wealthy mines or sedentary indigenous labor on the scale of Mesoamerica or Peru, Spain's rivals initially turned instead to gaining access to Spanish wealth through trade and plunder. Once established in relatively unimportant outposts in the Caribbean and the American mainland, Britain, France, and the Netherlands focused much of their naval ambition on high-seas depredations against the Spanish treasure fleets.²

While the relatively weak economic and military position of Elizabethan England necessitated dependence on the naval success of privateers, the England of Oliver Cromwell approached the Atlantic World with far more aggression. With relative peace in Europe and an underlying religious desire to place Protestantism in a more prominent position, Cromwell turned his sights on the Spanish Caribbean in an aggressive policy aptly called the Western Design. In 1655, Cromwell planned an all-out attack on a Spanish territory in the West Indies in the tradition of Elizabethan raids conducted by privateers such as Francis Drake. While Cromwell expected his planned raid to continue in the Elizabethan legacy of war 'beyond the line,' the reality of his overtly aggressive policy necessitated a break in amicable relations in the eyes of the Spanish – setting the stage for eighteenth-century conflicts where belligerence in the Americas translated to widespread warfare on the European mainland.³ Although Cromwell dispatched Admiral Robert Venables without clear orders of which Spanish possession to attack, when the fleet landed at Barbados the admiral and his advisors quickly settled on Hispaniola as the site for English aggression in the Spanish Caribbean.

² For a more complete summary of European piracy in the Americas see: Kris E. Lane's *Pillaging the Empire: Piracy in the Americas, 1500-1750* (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 1998). For a more general description of piracy see: C.R. Pennell's *Bandits at Sea: A Pirates Reader* (New York: New York University Press, 2001).

³ A.P. Newton, *The European Nations in the West Indies 1493-1688* (Adam & Charles Black, London, 1933): 213.

While Venables gathered supplies and a hodge-podge assembly of men in Barbados, the grand design was betrayed by the Spanish Ambassador in London who warned his counterparts in Iberia that plans for an English invasion were underway. Ambassador Don Alonso de Cárdenas even named Hispaniola as a possible site of the imminent attack, leading to the intensification of fortifications on the island.⁴ The stepped up defenses around Santo Domingo along with the inability of Admiral Venables and his counterpart in the invasion, Admiral Penn, to conduct the siege cooperatively, disembarking too far away from the town, lack of food, rain, trekking from the coast without a guide, and suffering ambushes along the way, led to three brutal and fruitless weeks of fighting.⁵ Even though Venables and Penn were unable to grasp their target, the survivors of the expedition turned their ambitions towards the relatively unimportant island of Jamaica – with drastic consequences for the history of the Caribbean and British prowess in the Atlantic World.

The defensive position in which the Spanish crown found itself during the seventeenth century, both in the Caribbean and on the continent, drastically affected its ability to provide defenses and supplies to backwater locations such as Jamaica. In order to provide protection for the treasure fleets, upon which Spain's war efforts throughout Europe depended, the Spanish crown focused its naval forces strictly on defense of the *carrera de indias* and the ports which provided harbor to those treasure-laden ships – rather than providing defense for peripheral territories such as Jamaica. Dutch privateer Piet Heyn's spectacular success in the early decades of the seventeenth century cemented Spain's commitment to protecting the treasure fleet at the expense of the rest of its

⁴ Francisco Morales Padrón, *Spanish Jamaica* (Ian Randle Publishers, Kingston & Miami, 2003):182.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 184.

American empire. In 1628, don Juan de Benavides commanded a fleet of fifteen ships, only four of which were capable of warfare, on their way from New Spain to Havana and then ending in Seville. Other than the four galleons, the other eleven ships were merchant ships laden with silver, gold, pearls, and other treasures being shipped from the Indies. While approaching Havana, Benavides encountered a fleet of thirty-two Dutch ships blocking the harbor. In avoidance of a Dutch attack, he attempted to slip into Matanzas Bay. Unfortunately, “Benavides’ pilots were apparently less familiar with this bay’s shoals than they claimed, and several of the large ships foundered, stranding the treasure well offshore and leaving most of the ships’ guns pointing the wrong way. Heyn and his men seized the opportunity and captured all fifteen vessels, taking half for prizes and setting fire to the rest.”⁶ Benavides was summarily executed upon his return to Spain due to his apparent negligence that resulted in the loss of approximately 12 million florins of imperial and private treasure. Although no privateer ever claimed as large a prize as Heyn, the disastrous loss of the annual treasure fleet focused Spanish naval attention specifically on the *carrera de indias* – inadvertently contributing to the loss of the island of Jamaica.

The Jamaica of the Spanish empire served as little more than a backwater to the more important colonies in New Spain and Peru. The island suffered both from a lack of supplies as much from an utter lack of proper military installations and protection from the crown. Even the ragged survivors of Cromwell’s Western Design proved capable of taking Santiago de la Vega and spreading out across the island. Despite two separate waves of reinforcements from Mexico, Jamaica remained in the hands of the British. Following a brief conflict in which England and France engaged in an alliance against

⁶ Kris E. Lane, *Pillaging the Empire: Piracy in the Americas: 1500-1750* (M.E. Sharpe, Inc. 1998):70.

Spain, the Spanish crown eventually recognized English claims to Jamaica and signed a peace treaty in 1667 in Madrid. The peace treaty, while ceding Jamaica permanently to the British, reflected Spanish desires to oblige their British counterparts to rein in privateering in the Caribbean.⁷ With official recognition of their territorial claims in the Greater Antilles, Cromwell issued immediate orders to the governor of Jamaica to halt the English privateers defending the island's coast. The subsequent disregard of those orders by Governor Thomas Modyford would set the stage for the conflict between privateers and merchantmen which came to characterize Jamaican politics in the eighteenth century.

As Britain gained territories in the Americas, British merchants engaged in a more vigorous transatlantic trade with a growing attention to tapping under-supplied Spanish markets. The indiscriminate attacks of loosely sanctioned pirates and privateers which characterized the Elizabethan sea-wars now worked against the interests of the British crown, whose merchants complained vociferously about the pirate-infested waters of the Caribbean.⁸ In response, the British navy initiated a policy of hunting down the pirates who had been sanctioned by the state in generations prior. The eighteenth century became the era of contraband trade in the Americas as British merchants endeavored more completely to break through Spanish mercantilist control. Nowhere were the tensions between royal order and local reality more acutely felt than the fledgling island of Jamaica, whose security, politics, and economic welfare largely depended on privateers and smugglers.

⁷ Elizabeth Mancke, "Empire and State," in David Armitage and Michael J. Braddick, eds. *The British Atlantic World: 1500-1800* (Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2002): 185.

⁸ An excellent work that deals with British policy regarding piracy is Joel Baer's *British Piracy in the Golden Age: History and Interpretation, 1660-1730* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2007).

The nature of the Caribbean contraband trade that developed shortly after Britain's acquisition of Jamaica requires defining: yet, by the same token, it defies definition. To some extent, this work will use the words smuggling, contraband, illicit trade, and interlopers to denote the same phenomenon – the introduction of merchandise to Spanish America in defiance of Spanish mercantilist legislation which prohibited the entry of foreign goods. Contraband in this sense can be defined as “inter-imperial or supranational trade (sometimes called ‘direct trade’) that was illicit from the vantage point of at least one of the colonial powers involved.”⁹ From the Spanish perspective, such a definition appears rather straightforward. Complications, however, arise from the British understanding of the trade – especially in accommodating the disparate economic desires of the metropolis and Jamaica. For the islanders, whose economic survival depended on interloping in the early years before the explosion of sugar production, the tensions between imperial trade and their own smuggling operations served as a constant source of contention. Negotiations for the *asiento de negros*, or the legal right to supply Spanish America with African slave labor, further compromised Jamaica's economic niche and brought its illicit operations under the increasing scrutiny of the metropolis. Exploring the role of Jamaica in this web of pseudo-legal interimperial trade while demonstrating the constant conflict present between British merchants and Jamaican interlopers will be the focus of the rest of this chapter.

The use of privateers that characterized British policy regarding Spain in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries turned abruptly as the possibility of attaining the coveted *asiento* contract became a reality in the eighteenth century. Clearing Caribbean

⁹ Wim Klooster, “Inter-Imperial Smuggling in the Americas, 1600-1800” in Bernard Bailyn and Patricia L. Denault eds. *Soundings in Atlantic History: Latent Structures and Intellectual Currents, 1500-1830* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge & London, 2009): 141.

Sea lanes of British naval predators became a fundamental part of Britain's foreign policy in the hopes that such actions would make its bid for the asiento contract more appealing to Spain. While even Spain had recognized Britain's right to maintain its hold on Jamaica with the stipulation that its sailors end their high seas depredations, the nature of security in the Caribbean made the enforcement of such a policy a more complicated endeavor for officials in London.

For decades prior to this fundamental shift in policy, British territories in the Americas depended on privateering vessels for naval defense in the absence of an abundance of official vessels of the British Navy.¹⁰ In fact, the practice of impressment meant that the Navy's presence oftentimes prejudiced the security of the areas it was attempting to protect. During King William's War, in the final decades of the seventeenth century, the increased presence of the British Navy in the waters around Jamaica aroused the ire of the Council of Jamaica. According to the Council's minutes from July 21, 1696, "Moreover all our privateers and seamen (who were a great good and strength to the Island) have left us, and most of this has happened by the harassing and ill-using of the men-of-war, who have frightened away not only our own people but also those of the Northern Colonies from bringing us provisions."¹¹ The British Navy's dependency on impressment in order to man its war effort quite literally scared away Jamaica's primary line of defense – the pirates and privateers who called Kingston home. In fact, the demands of the British Navy during King William's War, coupled with the disastrous

¹⁰ A well-written analysis of this practice can be found in Denver Alexander Brunsman's "The Evil Necessity: British Naval Impressment in the Eighteenth-Century Atlantic World" (PhD diss.) Princeton University, 2004.

¹¹ Great Britain, Public Record Office, *Calendar of State Papers, Colonial* no. 97 (1696-1697): 42 (hereafter cited as CSP).

loss of life after a major earthquake in 1696, threatened the very survival of Jamaica. The conclusion of the war the following year gave the island an opportunity to collect itself and its resources, but wartime correspondence made it clear that Jamaicans preferred their veritable fleet of privateers to the protection offered by the official British Navy.

As the British navy attempted to rid Caribbean waters of Jamaica's pirates, it offended not simply the island's attempt to attain security but a part of its economic lifeblood as well. As a fledgling outpost of the British Empire, Jamaican residents utilized their island's strategic position in the Caribbean by converting Kingston into a hub of contraband trade with the Spanish Main – basically carving out for themselves a position as middleman in a lucrative and illegal supply chain. As described by Jamaican resident Richard Harley in a letter to the Board of Trade in the months prior to the final signing of the *asiento* contract, “The Trade with the Spaniards from Jamaica (tho' Collusive) has been very considerable: and 'tis for certain for seven Years past (about which time is commenced *de Novo*) the Spaniards have been supplied from thence, one Year with another, with three or four thousand Negroes, in return for which, and for Flower, Woollen and other Goods, there has been received from them in Gold and Silver and the Produce of New Spain, 200,000 *l.* or 250,000 *l.* Yearly.”¹² While more research needs to be done on the far-flung trade networks that supplied the flour and woolen goods which Harley cites, Jamaica's role as a transit point for illicit trade with Spanish America appears both profitable and well-established in the decades before Britain attained the *asiento* contract.

¹² Elizabeth Donnan, *Documents Illustrative of the History of the Slave Trade to America* (Carnegie Institute of Washington, 1931): 151.

The lucrative trade already being conducted through the island of Jamaica was foremost on the minds of British officials as they vied to gain control over the asiento contract. Within the first decades of the eighteenth century, a European conflict provided Britain the opportunity to snatch the contract away from France, thereby increasing their access to Spanish American ports in a diplomatically safer way than through widespread smuggling. The death of Charles II of Spain without an heir embroiled Europe in a decade long conflict. In 1712, however, the conflict ended with the installation of a Bourbon monarch on the Spanish throne and appeasements granted to all of the powers involved. For its part in the Grand Alliance, Britain was granted the asiento contract for a period of thirty years, thereby opening an entirely new economic opportunity for the rising Protestant power.¹³

During the negotiations for the asiento contract, which was intended to run for thirty years starting in 1713, one of the foremost challenges for the new Spanish monarch, Phillip V, revolved around whether or not to allow the British to engage in additional trade while delivering a specified number of slaves annually to Spanish American ports. The knowledge that neither the Dutch nor the French after them turned a profit during their possession of the asiento spurred the British negotiator, Manuel Manassas Gilligan, to push for expanded trading privileges. The contract that Phillip V eventually signed included a hard-won provision for limited trade. The additional article reads:

Besides the foregoing articles stipulated on behalf of the English company, his Catholick Majesty, considering the losses which former assientists have sustained, and upon this express condition, that the said company shall not carry on, not attempt any unlawful trade directly or

¹³ Peter Bakewell, *A History of Latin America, c. 1450 to the Present* (Blackwell Publishing, 2004): 271.

indirectly, under any pretence whatsoever; and to manifest to her Britannick Majesty, how much he desires to pleasure her, and to conform more and more to a strict and good correspondence, has been pleased, by his royal decree of the 12th of March in this present year, to allow to the company of this asiento, a ship of five hundred tons yearly, during the thirty years of its continuance, to trade therewith to the Indies. . .¹⁴

Although Phillip V granted the British assientists a five hundred ton trade ship, the article proceeds to stipulate that trade was only permitted in correspondence with the annual Spanish trade fairs, indicating an attempt by Phillip V to soften the economic blow of British trade on Spain's own commerce with its colonies. Despite this stipulation, British merchants trading under the guise of the asiento contract rarely timed their trading endeavors to coincide with the annual fleets sent from Sevilla. And, yet, the economic consequences of the British asiento trade to Spanish America may not have been nearly as detrimental as the contraband trade upon which many Spanish American ports depended for survival. While British assientists provided some competition for Iberian manufactures, the interlopers operating out of places like Jamaica proved much more successful in saturating Spanish American markets with affordable trade goods.

For the British, the inclusion of the article required deft political maneuvering – an indication that the slave trade was neither inherently profitable nor even the foremost reason why Britain sought to acquire the asiento. In fact, the key British negotiator, Manuel Manassas Gilligan, engaged in widespread smuggling in the Caribbean in his early years. Arguably then, the inclusion of the clause reflected Gilligan's knowledge of

¹⁴ Frances Gardiner Davenport, *European Treaties Bearing on the History of the United States and its Dependencies* (Carnegie Institute of Washington, 1934): 184.

the possible profit to be made from smuggling in Spanish America.¹⁵ While the asiento contract provided for a certain amount of legal trade to be conducted with Spanish America in goods other than slaves, obtaining that contract proved extremely unpopular amongst most Jamaicans – despite the prominent role the island would eventually play in the trade.

In the years before Britain acquired Jamaica, the island's role as a conduit for illicit trade was relatively well-established. The Spanish residents, largely ignored by the trade ships sent from Sevilla, produced hides from the island's feral cattle population and wood cut from its forests – goods which they were unable to get to legal markets. Despite the prevalence of salable merchandise on the island, "While they waited for a ship, hides rotted, and wood was consumed by termites. On the other hand, the ships that did arrive carried in their holds products of higher value than those of the island. Therefore, the islanders were unable to buy goods and no one dared dispatch a ship to Jamaica for the purposes of trade. Hence was born the 'silent-trade' with the pirates, taking their place on the margins of royal regulations."¹⁶ While the island's sovereignty changed in the seventeenth century, its economic role remained largely the same – now augmented by the collusion of the Royal African Company in supplying slaves to Jamaica both for the islanders themselves and for their illicit redistribution to Spanish American ports.

The Royal African Company served as Britain's royally sanctioned slave trading company during the seventeenth century.¹⁷ While the company continued to exist into the

¹⁵ Lance Grahn, *The Political Economy of Smuggling: Regional Economies of Early Bourbon New Granada* (Westview Press, 1997): 122.

¹⁶ Francisco Morales Padrón, *Spanish Jamaica* (Ian Randle Publishers, Kingston & Miami, 2003): 159.

¹⁷ For a summary of the Royal African Company, see: Charles Hayes, Malachy Postlethwayt, and Kenneth Morgan's *The British Transatlantic Slave Trade. Vol. 2, The Royal African Company* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2003).

mid-1740s, its economic demise was largely guaranteed by the formation of the South Sea Company whose charter gave it the sole right to conduct the asiento trade – veritably sounding the death knell of a company which had lost its monopoly in 1698.¹⁸ The Royal African Company also continually faced challenges from independent traders who gained access to portions of the African coast and transported slaves to the Americas. With the declining importance of the Royal African Company in the transatlantic African slave trade in the eighteenth century, Jamaican interlopers and planters found themselves forced to deal with the South Sea Company – whose business interests were focused more on tapping the Spanish market than providing for the livelihood of Jamaicans. In addition, the royal sanction given to the South Sea Company essentially excluded Jamaican interlopers from their historic economic position in the Caribbean. On September 7, 1713, the South Sea Company received monopoly over the Spanish American slave trade by mandate of the British crown. That monopoly privilege essentially excluded active participation from either the Royal African Company or Jamaican interlopers.¹⁹ From the beginning of the operations of the South Sea Company, then, the stage was set for conflict between the royally sanctioned company and the Jamaicans whose livelihood depended on their illicit trade with the Spanish Main.

The island of Jamaica, positioned in the center of the Spanish Caribbean, was a natural choice as a refreshment station for the South Sea Company's transatlantic slaving vessels. Initially, both Barbados and Jamaica were used as refreshment stations but, by the mid-1720s, Jamaica eclipsed Barbados in importance due to the resources of the

¹⁸ David Hancock, *Citizens of the World: London Merchants and the Integrations of the British Atlantic Community, 1735-1785* (Cambridge University Press, 1995): 175.

¹⁹ Colin Palmer, *Human Cargoes: The British Slave Trade to Spanish America, 1700-1739* (University of Illinois Press, 1981): 10.

island and the volume of trade carried on there.²⁰ The abundance of cattle and produce in the early decades of the eighteenth century, before the island was completely dedicated to the production of sugar, meant that factories on the island were well stocked.²¹ The refreshment stations in Kingston allowed South Sea Company agents to recuperate their slaves after the notoriously insalubrious Middle Passage in an attempt to make them appear healthy before being shipped to their final destinations for sale. According to Palmer, “The agents made special efforts to feed the slaves well at this time. Twice a day they were fed meals that included beef, rice, flour, yams, biscuits, bread, fish, bananas, and a Barbadian food called canky.”²² The increased commerce in providing victuals to the refreshment stations, however, did little to offset the loss in valuable contraband.

Conflict between the metropolis and Jamaica largely defined the relationship between the two entities from the early decades of British control of the island. Residents of Jamaica maintained a mutually beneficial relationship with the pirates and privateers who provided income and protection for the island – a relationship which directly pitted colonial concerns against imperial desires. As Britain engaged in the slave trade to Spanish America, the tensions between the metropolis and Jamaica heightened, eventually leading to a flurry of correspondence across the Atlantic that argued against the operations of the South Sea Company and the *asiento* contract. According to a letter from the Council of Trade and Plantations to the King of England, “the Gentlemen of Jamaica, who have attended us on behalf of the Island, do say, that the *Assiento* being

²⁰ Ibid., 59.

²¹ Factories is a term used to describe European merchant enclaves throughout the world. In this work, the term factories will be used to describe the bases of economic activity of the South Sea Company in the Americas and along the African coast and the men engaged in the Company’s commerce will be referred to as factors.

²² Ibid., 61.

solely in the South Sea Company, exclusive of all interlopers, is a great detriment to Jamaica, where formerly the inhabitants had a considerable trade in negroes by connivance to the Spanish Coast.”²³ While merchants and interlopers in Jamaica engaged the Council of Trade on their behalf, the political pull of the South Sea Company in Parliament meant that the island’s appeals largely fell on deaf ears. The assiduous efforts of British politicians to obtain the asiento contract and the financial interests engaged in the formation of the South Sea Company effectively meant that Jamaican complaints had little effect across the Atlantic.

Despite the complaints of Jamaican planters and interlopers regarding the operations of the South Sea Company, the island’s issues were largely overshadowed by more pressing imperial concerns. For the British Empire, trade with Spanish America brought in invaluable specie which was necessary for their trade with India – the maintenance of which the British crown deemed more important than the complaints of a few planters and seamen. In order to maintain its trade with India, Britain annually exported £400,000. Without a domestic supply of silver, the majority of the specie employed in the India trade came from foreign sources like Spanish America.²⁴ Additionally, certain trading posts along the African coast demanded cloth imported from India in exchange for slaves – thereby requiring Britain to maintain a steady supply in order to furnish slaves for the transatlantic trade, upon which Jamaican planters depended.²⁵ From an imperial perspective, despite the intense ire aroused in Jamaica by the asiento contract, it could be argued that Britain’s very ability to supply slaves to the

²³ CSP, no. 272 (1717-18): 132.

²⁴ Curtis Nettels. “England and the Spanish American Trade, 1680-1715” *The Journal of Modern History*, 3, No. 1 (Mar., 1931): 8.

²⁵ Stuart B. Schwartz, ed. *Tropical Babels: Sugar and the Making of the Atlantic World, 1450-1680* (The University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill & London, 2004): 218.

Americas therefore depended on their active participation in a legal Spanish-American trade.²⁶

While the asiento contract injured the economic well-being of Jamaican interlopers, another financial interest on the island felt sufficiently threatened by the South Sea Company to join in the chorus of complaints leveled at Parliament. The island's sugar planters overwhelmingly felt that the asiento contract with Spanish America prejudiced their ability to acquire labor sufficient for their burgeoning plantations. The governing class of Jamaica was largely composed of wealthy planters, Sir Nicholas Lawes being no exception. In accordance with his position on the island, Governor Lawes complained vociferously against the practice of the South Sea Company to ship the healthiest slaves to Spanish America. According to Lawes in a letter to the Council of Trade and Plantations of November 11, 1717, "The Assiento carries all the able, stout and young negros, or such as they call peic'd Indias to the Spaniards and sell none to the Planters but the old sickly and decrepid, or what are call'd Refuse; if a choice negro is sold to a Planter, he might give as much or more than that of the Spaniard and that in ready money."²⁷ The dearth of specie throughout the British Empire especially injured the ability of Jamaicans to compete with Spanish buyers, who were rarely forced to rely on credit to purchase their slaves in the same way that their Jamaican counterparts did. For the financial success of the South Sea Company, then, it is hardly surprising that it preferred Spanish markets.

²⁶ A good summary of the effect of Spanish American silver during the Early Modern period can be found in Stanley J. and Barbara H. Stein's, *Silver, Trade, and War: Spain and America in the Making of Early Modern Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000).

²⁷ CSP, no. 196 (1717-18): 103.

The main conflict between the South Sea Company and Jamaican elites came in the form of legislation especially prejudicial to the company. During the tenure of Governor Lawes, from 1718 until 1722, the island's council began to vigorously enforce a head tax on all slaves unloaded on the island, even if their arrival was simply for refreshment and not sale. Governor Lawes offered an elegant defense of the island's right to extract such a tax from the South Sea Company. Lawes explained that the tax had always been a part of Jamaican legislation even during the days of the Royal African Company – what had changed, of course, was enforcement. Regardless, Lawes argued, “But this duty of 20s. per head was laid by the Assembly many years before the South Sea Company had the Assiento, and is paid by all H.M. subjects. It may be concluded that the Company orders their ships to Jamaica as being the most convenient port. They can well afford to pay that easie duty, which is not half so much as their factors gain by them. But if they cannot afford to pay the duty out of the profits of the Assiento, then it may be supposed the negroes imployed on our Plantations are of greater advantage to this Kingdome, than selling them to the Spaniard.”²⁸ Governor Lawes' letter indicates a firmly entrenched belief in Jamaica that the South Sea Company was enriching itself at the expense of Jamaica's economic survival.

For its part, the South Sea Company claimed that its involvement in Jamaica – using the island as a refreshment and distribution point – contributed positively to the island's economy. As explained by the Council of Trade and Plantations to the King of England, “the Company do frequently hire sloops in the Island for transporting their slaves after they are refresh'd to the Spanish Continent, and their own ships being oblig'd either to return home empty or accept of a moderate freight, the inhabitants of Jamaica do

²⁸ CSP, no. 272 (1717-18): 132.

thence obtain an opportunity of sending home the product of their Island on much cheaper terms than formerly.”²⁹ The absurdity of the South Sea Company arguing that it contributed positively to the economy of Jamaica by providing cheaper shipping back to the metropolis, even though without slave labor Jamaican planters had very little produce to ship, was not lost on the coalition of planters and interlopers. Even the argument that the South Sea Company hired Jamaican sloops to carry slaves to the Spanish Main must be understood with the qualifier ‘frequently,’ meaning that many times the South Sea Company maintained the slave trade using its own vessels – thereby completely cutting Jamaican interlopers out of their former trade.

Although Governor Lawes’ prolific pen brought the troubles of Jamaica to the attention of the British Parliament, the political prestige of the South Sea Company frequently beat out the island’s interest. Defenders of the South Sea Company were also able to play on much more deeply entrenched fears than their Jamaican counterparts. In a letter from Daniel Wescomb, an employee of the South Sea Company, to William Popple, the Secretary of the Lords of Trade, Wescomb argues that, “the Company conceive it to be contrary to the practice of all Nations, where goods are imported duty free to burthen ‘em upon their re-exportation, and they can’t but deem this duty to be an infringement upon the Assiento contract, in which H.M. and the King of Spain are parties; that after a contract has been entered into for 30 years, that Trade shou’d be burthen’d with new duties, and may occasion a misunderstanding with the King of Spain and be of ill consequence.”³⁰ The tenor of Wescomb’s letter seems constructed to touch on an ever-present fear for the British throughout the era of the asiento contract, namely

²⁹ CSP, no. 272 (1717-18): 132.

³⁰ CSP, no. 206 (1717-18): 106.

that a conflict between Spain and Britain would cause a disruption in their profitable trade relations. Such fears appear more reasonable when considered in terms of the global trade which would be prejudiced by a cessation of the Spanish American trade. By playing on British fears of a misunderstanding between the two thrones, Wescomb's appeal and others like it led to an order that Jamaica repeal the duty on slaves on January 9th, 1718.³¹ This brief political conflict reflected the immense unpopularity of the asiento contract amongst Jamaicans – who did not abandon their lucrative trade with Spanish America but, rather, took it further underground.

Following the tradition of the island, the principal means available to Jamaicans to counter the economic monopoly of the South Sea Company was the contraband trade. As planters complained about the low-quality slaves being sold to them while those of the highest quality were being shipped to Spanish America, interlopers turned this to their advantage. In a telling letter from the South Sea Company to James Pym, the president of the Cartagena factory, on December 12th, 1723, company officials argued, “the Great if not the only Cause of that Factorys not being So well Supplyd as they might have otherwise been, and has been a very Great Encouragement to the private Traders, who find no Difficulty of Furnishing themselves at Jamaica out of what we leave, and at more Easy Rates.”³² Jamaican interlopers cut into the South Sea Company's monopoly by clandestinely trading the lower quality slaves which the Company left in Jamaica to the Spanish Main for much lower prices than those stipulated by the asiento contract. Interestingly, as will be seen in the final chapter, independent Jamaican interlopers

³¹ CSP, no. 303 (1717-18): 153.

³² Elizabeth Donnan, *Documents Illustrative of the History of the Slave Trade to America* (Carnegie Institute of Washington, 1931): 307.

primarily functioned as competition for agents of the South Sea Company who also engaged in widespread smuggling of both slaves and merchandise.

While Jamaican planters railed against the quality of slaves being shipped to Spanish America at their expense, the South Sea Company struggled to meet the specific demands of the *asiento* contract. The contract allowed the South Sea Company legal hegemony over the slave trade to Spanish America for thirty years, with a yearly total of 4,800 *piezas de Indias* – a standard measurement of slaves delivered which accounted for the age, condition, and gender of the slaves. It was critical to the South Sea Company's profitability that they deliver all of the *piezas* allowed to them each year. As the contract worked out, "a duty of 33 1/3 pesos would be paid the Spanish crown on each of the first 4,000 *piezas*; the remaining 800 would be admitted duty free. In the event that the company delivered more than 4,800 *piezas* in a year, it would pay a duty of 16 2/3 pesos on each excess *pieza*."³³ Therefore, despite the vociferous complaints of Jamaicans, the South Sea Company's financial success depended on delivering all 4,000 *piezas* allowed each year in order to sell the last 800 without being subject to paying a duty – naturally placing primacy on supplying the Spanish American market before that of Jamaica.

While the South Sea Company energetically engaged in the *asiento* contract in the hope of amassing wealth through access to Spanish American ports, its dreams of wealth proved evanescent.³⁴ As Palmer effectively argues, in addition to political instability throughout the period of the *asiento* contract, "The South Sea Company was also the

³³ Colin Palmer, *Human Cargoes: The British Slave Trade to Spanish America, 1700-1739* (University of Illinois Press, 1981): 9.

³⁴ Although focused in a later time period, an interesting account of the business of the slave trade and why it could be inherently unprofitable can be found in Stepehn D. Behrendt's 2001 article "Markets, Transaction Cycles, and Profits: Merchant Decision Making in the British Slave Trade" *The William and Mary Quarterly*. 58, no. 1: 171-204.

victim of the profound changes in the organization of the slave trade that had begun to occur in the eighteenth century. The chartered company was fast becoming a commercial anachronism; the age of the energetic private trader was at hand.”³⁵ Therefore, Palmer argues for an interesting interpretation of the political battles waged between Jamaican interests and the South Sea Company in the early years of the *asiento* contract – namely that while Jamaican planters and interlopers portrayed themselves as largely victimized by the imperial trade system, it would be the South Sea Company that proved unable to compete in the transatlantic slave trade. In the long run, the Kingston interlopers would far eclipse the South Sea Company in supplying the Spanish Main with much-needed trade goods. For its part, the South Sea Company struggled within the confines of the legal system to provide trade goods to Spanish America while its Jamaican counterparts engaged freely in trade – thereby dramatically increasing their profits. Although agents for the South Sea Company did, in fact, engage in contraband trading to Spanish American ports, the burden of judgment when traders were caught by Spanish officials fell squarely on the shoulders of the Company, even when it may not have been its agents conducting the contraband trade but, rather, their interloping Jamaican competitors. The reason for the steep demand and availability of contraband markets in Spanish America will be the focus of the next chapter.

³⁵ Ibid., 158.

CHAPTER TWO

THE ASIENTO CONTRACT IN CARTAGENA: IMPERIAL DESIRES AND COLONIAL REALITIES

Following the currents directly south from Jamaica, British contraband traders found themselves on the coast of New Granada. The fortuitous location of the island of Jamaica created a smugglers' paradise in the warm Caribbean waters between Kingston and the Spanish Main. In the 1730s, two young Spanish naval officers traveled extensively throughout Spanish America as escorts for a French scientific expedition. The officers, Jorge Juan y Santacilia and Antonio de Ulloa, recorded the observations they made on the voyage for the King and his ministers as well as for the consumption of the Spanish reading public. According to their testimony about the Spanish Main, "In more than 1500 leagues running from Caracas, Santa Marta, and Cartagena on the north coast to Lima, there are no armed forces except for those on the coast assigned to the defense of the farthest reaches of this extensive territory."¹ The vast expanse of the New Granada coastline coupled with a complicated geography of inlets, coves, and long stretches of unpopulated beaches made policing the coasts logistically and economically unfeasible.² How New Granada, with Cartagena de Indias as the focal point, became entrenched in

¹ Jorge Juan and Antonio de Ulloa, *Discourse and Political Reflections on the Kingdoms of Peru* (University of Oklahoma Press, 1978): 241.

² Juan Manuel Zapatero, *Historia de las Fortalezas de Santa Marta y Estudio Asesor para su Restauración* (Academia Colombiana de Historia, Bogotá, 1980): 132.

such widespread illegal commerce and what the Bourbon monarchy attempted to do to stop it will be the focus of this chapter.

The Spanish expansion from the Caribbean into mainland settlements in South America mirrored the search for gold which defined their plundering of Hispaniola and Cuba. Expeditions sent out with the goal of finding gold or silver were not particular to Spaniards in the colonial period, but their fortuitous encounter with the treasure-rich Aztec empire encouraged expeditions into unknown portions of the Spanish Main – setting up settlements along the way. One of the first, Cartagena de Indias, was established in 1533 by Pedro de Heredia as an outpost for the plundering of Indian communities along the Sinú River. After a few initial years of plundering Indian tombs for gold, “Spanish looting gave way to a more systematic exploitation of the land and its peoples. During the 1540s, stock raising was established in the vicinity of Cartagena, and surviving Indians were gathered in *encomiendas* to provide the tribute required to sustain the invaders’ settlements.”³ As looting was slowly replaced with placer mining, the colonial economy of Cartagena grew in importance along the Spanish Main – as did the demand for African slave labor to exploit the streambeds of the New Granadan interior.⁴

The gold rush in New Granada lasted long enough to establish the region as a sphere independent from Peruvian and Venezuelan influence but not long enough to establish it as an outpost worthy of the kinds of attention received by its wealthier counterparts in Peru and New Spain. By the mid-1620s, the gold rush in New Granada was over and not until the eighteenth century would the region resume production of gold

³Anthony McFarlane, *Colombia Before Independence: Economy, Society, and Politics Under Bourbon Rule* (Cambridge University Press, 1993): 8.

⁴A summary of the demand for slaves can be found in Nicolás del Castillo Mathieu’s *La llave de las Indias* (Bogotá: Ediciones El Tiempo, 1981).

in any considerable quantity. And yet, “New Granada had become a distinctive region in the empire, outside the orbit of the great, silver-based *espacio peruano* to the south, and with its own commercial connections to Spain.”⁵ New Granada’s evanescent gold rush in the sixteenth century proved to have a two-fold effect on the development of the city of Cartagena de Indias: it became a major port for the *flotas* of the *carrera de indias* on their way to Portobelo at the same time that it developed a flourishing contraband trade with its European neighbors in the Caribbean. The unreliability of the Spanish fleet system throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries left Cartagena with a fundamental lack of trade goods coupled with an excess of specie in the form of gold and gold dust.

Throughout the colonial period, Spain’s entire American empire suffered from a constant lack of trade goods and supplies from the metropolis. Although some of the blame for such a dearth of goods lay in the overwhelming demands of the treasure fleet, the Spanish shipping industry seemed utterly incapable of providing even the most basic goods to places other than New Spain and Peru. By 1720, in fact, Phillip V issued a royal *cédula* regarding when the Spanish fleets should sail in order to *re-establish* trade between Spanish America and the Iberian Peninsula.⁶ The King’s emphasis throughout his royal order regarding the re-establishment of trade in order to stimulate Spanish manufacturers indicates just how little trade flowed between the two regions by the eighteenth century – the consequences of which would play out in the colonies between non-Iberian suppliers and Spanish colonists despite the ambitions of European monarchs.

For the fledgling settlements of New Granada, issues in establishing and maintaining royal governance reflected the physical topography of the territory as much

⁵ Ibid., 19.

⁶ Museo Naval de Madrid, No. inventario: 5279, Signatura: 4388, “*Proyecto Para Galeones, Y Flotas, de el Peru, Y Nueva España, Y Para Navios de Registro, Y Avisos Que Navegaron A Ambos Reynos*”.

as Spanish American-wide issues with the sale of positions and dearth of legal trade goods. Along the Spanish Main, “settlements were widely dispersed and each tended to become a distinctive cell, whose inhabitants sought to mark off their own territory from competitors in order to monopolize its resources. This tendency toward the creation of autonomous local units was, moreover, accentuated by the difficulties of communication over long distances and rugged terrain.”⁷ Interestingly, the evolution of an intense notion of local autonomy would eventually manifest itself in a sense of economic autonomy from Madrid – much to the ire of metropolitan officials. In the twilight years of the Hapsburgs on the Spanish throne, the city of Cartagena maintained its economic livelihood through participation in illegal interimperial trade throughout the Caribbean. Threats to the sovereignty of the city, including a successful attack by the French, brought the port to the attention of the metropolitan officials in the seventeenth century, yet reform would wait until the ascension of the Bourbons in the eighteenth.

An autonomous spirit in the city of Cartagena reflected the general sense of settlements throughout the Spanish Main, but it also evolved from the interesting legal position of the port in relation to the jurisdiction of the Audencia de Santa Fe – the precursor for the Viceroyalty of New Granada. On paper, from its founding in 1550, Bogotá served as the capital of civil and legal administration for the audencia – under whose jurisdiction Cartagena fell. Yet, the immense territory of New Granada was divided even further into local *gobiernos*, *alcaldías mayores*, and *corregimientos* which were, “divided by the jurisdictions of fiscal, military, civil, and ecclesiastical government, each designed to uphold a specific area of authority. In practice, however, such divisions

⁷ Anthony McFarlane, *Colombia Before Independence: Economy, Society, and Politics Under Bourbon Rule* (Cambridge University Press, 1993): 10.

fractured rather than facilitated royal control over the territory because they splintered central authority, thereby compounding the problems of communication and command imposed by distance.”⁸ While jurisdictional authority posed a problem throughout New Granada, the defensive position of Cartagena in the Caribbean convoluted issues of jurisdiction for the city. As *gobierno y comandancia general*, each governor of Cartagena was directly appointed by the King with special authority which left him largely outside the purview of the Audencia de Santa Fe.⁹

The expense of maintaining security for the *carrera de indias* as well as the added expense of conducting almost continual warfare in Europe weakened Spain’s financial stability – further detracting from its ability to provide for its American colonies. Perhaps the most telling example of the kinds of financial troubles encountered by Spain can be seen in the manner in which it staffed its colonial bureaucracy. By the seventeenth century, many of the positions of authority in Spanish American governance were being sold to the highest bidder in order to raise revenue for the crown.¹⁰ The practice of vending royal positions reflected offices being considered akin to land which could be bought, sold, or leased. The sale of offices, however, netted the Spanish monarch no wealth and “In this there was no profit for the Crown, and small thanks. What wonder that a prudent and impecunious king should seek to do on his own account what his loyal subjects, with royal connivance, had been doing for years.”¹¹ Accordingly, Phillip II engaged in the widespread sale of nonsalaried offices in Spanish America, raising much

⁸ Ibid., 23.

⁹ Ibid., 23.

¹⁰ A classic work regarding this practice is J.H. Parry’s *The Sale of Public Office in the Spanish Indies Under the Hapsburgs* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1953).

¹¹ J.H. Parry, *The Sale of Public Office in the Spanish Indies Under the Hapsburgs* (University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1953): 4.

needed revenue while simultaneously staffing colonial positions with individuals who considered their offices an investment – one on which they intended to both recoup their losses and perhaps gain a profit.

Intuitive of the possibility of corruption inherent in selling positions in royal administration, the crown decided to prohibit the sale of offices in which a salary was paid from royal coffers. Ostensibly, if officials were receiving a salary from the treasury, then they may be induced to embezzle money in order to repay the debts they accrued through purchasing the office.¹² The issue of falling into debt in order to purchase a position in colonial governance, however, led bureaucrats to engage in various business ventures in Spanish America even with the exclusion of salaried offices. Throughout Spanish America and across the colonial period, “The officials who purchased their posts tried to make as much money as possible during their tenure. A royal officeholder sent to the colonies from Spain ‘often had only a fixed number of years in the New World to pay off his debts and accumulate enough capital to live as expected upon his return.’”¹³ Officials who purchased their office expected that their position in colonial governance would result in a certain standard of living upon their return to Iberia. There existed a basic understanding that the purchase of the position was an investment with the expectation of a return – a return which purchasers would attain through licit or illicit means.

Those colonial officials who purchased office in Spanish America generally turned to whatever local commerce was prevalent in their region in order to earn a profit,

¹² Ibid., 5.

¹³ Wim Klooster, “Inter-Imperial Smuggling in the Americas, 1600-1800” in Bernard Bailyn and Patricia L. Denault eds. *Soundings in Atlantic History: Latent Structures and Intellectual Currents, 1500-1830* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge & London, 2009): 147.

for example, the cochineal trade in Mexico or silver mining in Peru.¹⁴ As powerful and educated men of the upper ranks of society, colonial officials generally experienced success in their economic ventures with those in Cartagena being no exception. For the governors of Cartagena and the viceroys of New Granada, however, the most profitable enterprise was the contraband trade with Jamaica. As a port city which lacked legal trade goods but held abundant specie, Cartagena left colonial officials little choice but to engage in the contraband trade that flourished throughout the Caribbean. By contrast, for Jamaican governors, sugar plantations provided them with abundant wealth equivalent to their station in life – an economic livelihood which largely put them at odds with the *asiento* contract and, by extension, the illicit trade to the Spanish Main. For that reason, and due to the source material used in this study, the Cartagena side of the contraband trade must necessarily be seen through the eyes of the royal officials who profited from such commerce. The prominence of royal officials in the following narrative, therefore, reflects both their prominence in the trade as well as a source base which provides little insight into other groups such as merchants or, even, who else may have been involved in the contraband trade.

The situation in Cartagena came to the full attention of royal authorities when, in 1685, a *visita general* was dispatched to the region in order to examine reports of local government's abuse of Indians as well as widespread evasion of taxes and duties. Under orders to investigate the functioning of local governance throughout New Granada,

¹⁴ For a summary of the colonial cochineal trade, see Jeremy Baskes' *Indians, Merchants, and Markets: A Reinterpretation of the Repartimiento and Spanish-Indian Economic Relations in Colonial Oaxaca, 1750-1821* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2000). For a summary of silver mining in Spanish America, see P.J. Bakewell's, *Mines of Silver and Gold in the Americas* (Aldershot, Hampshire, Great Britain: Variorum, 1997).

Carlos Alcedo y Sotomayor left for Cartagena. Upon his arrival in the city, however, the *Visitador-general* was barred from entering with the governor of Cartagena claiming that Alcedo had no jurisdiction within the city. “The governor then arrested Alcedo and, after failing to suborn him with a large bribe, deported him aboard a small, leaky boat bound for Havana.”¹⁵ While Alcedo returned to Madrid without fully accomplishing his intended mission, he was apparently able to ascertain that local governmental officials in Cartagena were engaged in gross misconduct – with perhaps the most biting indictment including a claim that “the crown was being defrauded of the enormous sum of 20,386 castellanos each year,” through evasion of payment of the *quinto*, or a tax of a royal fifth on the minting of gold, with the apparent collusion of local officials.¹⁶ While the most incriminating aspect of Alcedo’s report seemed to be the evasion of payment of the *quinto*, he also stressed the presence in Cartagena of foreign vessels conducting illegal trade in broad daylight throughout the port.

While Alcedo’s report suggests at least the tacit approval of royal officials in Cartagena in the contraband trade, for Spanish governors or viceroys in almost all Spanish American port cities during this period, illicit trade frequently constituted their only means to obtain basic necessities for the region under their jurisdiction. In their survey of Spanish America, Juan and Ulloa witnessed firsthand the widespread contraband trading in the port of Cartagena. According to their report, however, the contraband trade “happens only when the galleons or registry ships are late. If they were not delayed, there would be no shortage of supplies or excess of specie in the interior, which is the reason merchants throughout America engage in this vicious illicit

¹⁵Ibid., 25.

¹⁶ Ibid., 25.

commerce.”¹⁷ While Juan and Ulloa’s report came nearly a full century after the ill-fated *visita general* of Alcedo, the problem of supply contributing to the prevalence of contraband trade remained the same – which is not to say that the Bourbons failed to attempt to remedy the situation.

The tacit approval of the contraband trade on the part of governors and port officials in Cartagena reflected the lack of legal trade goods which entered the port. Arguably, by allowing foreign merchants to introduce basic foodstuffs, even if that also meant gaining a small profit from those transactions, governors were serving the greater good of the populace. In the century between the 1670s and the survey voyage of Juan and Ulloa, only ten galleon fleets passed through the port of Cartagena – six between 1675 and 1700¹⁸ and four between 1713 until 1763.¹⁹ Many of the intended voyages were prevented from embarking from Seville due to the almost continuous state of war on the continent and in the sea lanes of the Caribbean. Still others were waylaid in Spanish American ports, unable to sell their merchandise due to the prevalence of contraband goods in the markets. Throughout the colonial period, galleon fleets consistently encountered Spanish American markets flooded with goods from foreign contrabandists. Considering the content of most of the contraband vessels – flour and slaves – and the necessity of those items for the continued economic survival of New Granada, it is hardly surprising that the contraband trade flourished.²⁰

¹⁷ Jorge Juan and Antonio de Ulloa, *Discourse and Political Reflections on the Kingdoms of Peru* (University of Oklahoma Press, 1978): 48.

¹⁸ Anthony McFarlane, *Colombia Before Independence: Economy, Society, and Politics Under Bourbon Rule* (Cambridge University Press, 1993): 22.

¹⁹ Lance Grahn, *The Political Economy of Smuggling: Regional Economies in Early Bourbon New Granada* (Westview Press, Oxford, 1997): 20.

²⁰ Germán Colmenares, “La Formación de la Economía Colonial,” in José Antonio Ocampo, ed. *Historia Económica de Colombia* (Siglo Veintiuno Editores, Mexico, 1987): 39.

Contraband traders inundated local markets with goods at prices far lower than those which the merchants of the galleons and register ships could offer. The port of Cartagena attracted “buyers from as far away as Quito, smugglers offered necessities and luxuries on the northern coast at cheaper prices than licit goods. In fact, a study by highly placed Spanish officials estimated that foreign traders undersold legitimate peninsular merchants by 40 percent and still obtained a greater profit.”²¹ The legitimate merchants referred to above traded strictly through Seville and, later, Cádiz and were subject to various taxes while non-Iberian suppliers were free from such onerous charges – along with generally being closer to the supplier, considering Seville’s role as a trans-shipment point rather than point of origin for most goods being carried across the Atlantic.²² Additionally, with approximately 1,800,000 pesos of silver from Potosí moving through Cartagena every year, the prevalence of foreign merchants willing to smuggle goods into Cartagena was nearly constant.²³

Following Alcedo’s expulsion from Cartagena and his subsequent report, the newly crowned Bourbon monarch sought to re-exert imperial influence on the Spanish Main. The cornerstones of the Bourbon reforms of the eighteenth century revolved around more efficient revenue collection, an issue that Alcedo’s report made clear was not occurring in Cartagena, and centralizing authority throughout the empire. With Phillip V firmly enthroned in Spain and Europe enjoying a brief respite from conflict after the War of Spanish Succession, the new monarch turned his reforming ambitions to

²¹ Lance Grahn, *The Political Economy of Smuggling: Regional Economies in Early Bourbon New Granada* (Westview Press, Oxford, 1997): 25.

²² For a discussion on the historiography of merchants in Spanish America, see Pedro Perez Herrero’s 1995 article, “Comercio y comerciantes en America Latina colonial: Reflexion historiografica” in the *Colonial Latin American Review*. 4, no. 1: 217-232

²³ Ibid., 18.

New Granada. Taking quite seriously the experience of Alcedo with local authorities as well as the strategic position of the port of Cartagena for security in the Caribbean, Phillip V and his ministers decided on a reform policy that would centralize authority in the region. As a result, “Aiming to improve and invigorate Spanish rule in northern South America, they created a viceroyalty around the Audencia of Santa Fe in 1719” and chose to make Bogotá the seat of authority for the fledgling audencia – under whose authority Cartagena would again fall, while simultaneously maintaining the autonomy it enjoyed previously due both to distance and military necessity.²⁴

Ostensibly, placing more centralized royal authority along the Spanish Main would bring the levels of the contraband trade on the coast down and allow for the resurgence of legal commerce between Spain and its colonies. In an effort to prepare local governance for their new viceroyalty, Phillip V sent an energetic reformer and former Minister of the Council of the Indies, Don Antonio de la Pedrosa y Guerrero. Eager to accomplish his mandate, Pedrosa immediately launched into an investigation of local governance. At the beginning of his two years in New Granada, Pedrosa, “reported that the volume of illegal trade in the city was so great that Cartagena had a serious shortage of legal currency. As a result, unminted bullion and counterfeit money served as the principal forms of exchange.”²⁵ While Pedrosa was able to collect back taxes from throughout the region which provided some capital for the new viceroyalty, he left the issue of curbing the contraband trade for the incoming viceroy, don Jorge de Villalonga, Conde de la Cueva.

²⁴ Ibid., 147.

²⁵ Lance Grahn, *The Political Economy of Smuggling: Regional Economies in Early Bourbon New Granada* (Westview Press, Oxford, 1997): 108.

The Bourbons intended the creation of the Viceroyalty of New Granada to provide royal authority which would help increase revenue collection and curb the contraband trade.²⁶ The role of Viceroy Villalonga, then, revolved around clearing the port of Cartagena of foreign merchants so that the markets would not be satiated upon the arrival of the galleon fleets. The new viceroy's voyage from Peru to his new viceregal seat, however, highlights the contradictions both between Bourbon expectations and a royal official whose career began in a Hapsburgian system as well as the inherent logic of the contraband trade which defied imperial mandates at every level. While traveling to his post with his family and entourage, Villalonga occupied ten full canoes – a high number for the transportation of only twelve people. During the investigation of his tenure following his dismissal, it became clear that the canoes were largely full of articles of clothing which he sold for a profit in the city of Mompós on his way to the coast. According to the official *sentencia del consejo*, in fact, Villalonga made close to 20,000 pesos in Mompós through the sale of his trade goods.²⁷ Villalonga's entrance into Cartagena positioned him for participation in local commerce which, despite the desires of the Bourbons, meant illicit commerce.

The charges leveled against Villalonga at the end of his term include active involvement in the contraband trade and may reveal a fundamental disconnect between the expectations of a viceroy in colonial Spanish America and the contradictory expectations of the Bourbons. Villalonga's lucrative voyage from Peru to his viceregal seat falls in line with the behavior of viceroys throughout the colonial period. The arrival

²⁶ While focused on New Spain and in a later period, a useful summary of the Bourbon reforms can be found in Stanley J. Stein and Barbara H. Stein's *Apogee of Empire: Spain and New Spain in the Age of Charles III, 1759-1789* (Baltimore, Md: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003).

²⁷ Archivo General de Indias. Escribanía de Cámara 1194, Sentencias del Consejo, Sentencia de Jorge de Villalonga, Virrey de Santa Fe, 1730.

of any new viceroy in Spanish America meant that he was, “accompanied by a large entourage of family members and servants, all anxious for rich pickings in the New World during his tenure of office. His arrival on American soil, and his passage through his territory to the capital city, was as carefully staged a ritual event as if the king himself were taking possession of his realm.”²⁸ Furthermore, travelling with items for sale in the colonial marketplace in order to acquire sufficient capital to set up a viceregal household in the New World was common practice during the era of the Hapsburgs. While more research remains to be done on the differing expectations of the Bourbon monarchs and their viceregal counterparts in the early decades of the eighteenth century, Villalonga’s behavior was considered acceptable in generations prior. Ostensibly, Villalonga epitomized colonial corruption in the eyes of the Bourbon monarch who sent him specifically to deal with the contraband commerce which ran rampant in New Granada when he engaged in that commerce. However, for Villalonga, himself of noble birth, the title of viceroy came with certain institutionalized behavior, in which he engaged and for which he was eventually punished.

Despite Bourbon expectations, the contraband trade arguably flourished under Villalonga’s administration. In a report from José Patiño, the Minister of Marine and the Indies, by 1721, the viceregal experiment in New Granada was near collapse. Patiño’s letter details Villalonga’s involvement in smuggling contraband clothing from the coast, allowing his family members to enrich themselves through the contraband trade, and incorporating local officials into his profitable smuggling ring. Perhaps the most irksome indictment of Patiño’s letter, however, revolved around Villalonga’s apparent disregard

²⁸ J.H. Elliott. *Empires of the Atlantic World: Britain and Spain in America, 1492-1830* (Yale University Press, 2006): 125.

for preventing foreign ships from entering the harbor at Cartagena. In fact, according to Patiño, “there has not arrived a Vessel, nor any type of ship be it English, Dutch, or French, that has not been permitted in said Port or, in the coast unloading all of their cargo, as there is evidence of having happened in Cartagena when foreign Vessels were allowed to unload their cargo eight days before the arrival of the Galleons.”²⁹ From the perspective of Phillip V, the final indictment was the most upsetting because it directly prejudiced the efficacy of his reforms in New Granada and the security of the port. In an arguably theatrical twist to Phillip V’s restructuring efforts, the very Viceroy placed in a position to eliminate the contraband trade and ready Spanish markets for the trade fleets actually amassed wealth through increasing the allowance for foreign contrabandists into Cartagena. What Patiño’s letter neglects to mention, however, was the lack of *Spanish* trade ships in the port of Cartagena. While in the eyes of Patiño, Villalonga defied imperial ambitions by allowing the entrance of foreign merchant vessels, for the people of Cartagena and its environs, those ships carried their only access to basic necessities.

Despite Patiño’s incriminating letter to the king, the viceroyalty of New Granada remained under Villalonga’s tenure for an additional two years – during which time the Viceroy and his retinue used every means at their disposal to enrich themselves. Villalonga largely did not personally engage in commerce at the port and, therefore, depended on others for the maintenance of his commercial networks. In positions where he needed to be assured of loyalty, he also appointed members of his own family – which, in and of itself, reflected common practice among high-ranking officials in

²⁹ Archivo General de Indias, Santa Fe 374, Letter from José Patiño to the King, April 14, 1722. Translation is my own.

Spanish America.³⁰ Following the termination of the Viceroyalty of New Granada, however, the governor of the Audencia of Santa Fe conducted an investigation of Villalonga's term in office – a veritable laundry list of offenses, among which the inclusion of members of his family in colonial governance was listed. According to the charges leveled against Villalonga, the Viceroy named his nephew to the position of *Juez de Comisos*, a position which ostensibly allowed him to smuggle in contraband clothing from the coast without the necessity of bribing another official.³¹ The appointment of his nephew to a profitable position, however, did not deviate from normal practice in Spanish America and the creation of commercial ties through kinship allowed Villalonga to conduct business that depended on loyalty through the port – a practice mirrored in concurrent British merchant firms.

The appointment of family members to positions in colonial governance fell well in line with appropriate behavior for viceroys in Spanish America. The entourage that accompanied new viceroys to the Americas veritably depended on those appointments to make a profit during their stay in the New World. In fact, viceroys were granted “considerable powers of patronage and appointment” during their tenure and were able to bring large numbers of family members with them due to this privilege.³² In the case of Villalonga, he may have received condemnation for his appointment for several reasons, each plausible yet difficult to prove. Primarily, Villalonga may have been censured for

³⁰ While dealing with Mexico, a good study of viceregal practices in colonial Spanish America can be found in Alejandro Cañeque's *The King's Living Image The Culture and Politics of Viceregal Power in Colonial Mexico* (New York, N.Y.: Routledge, 2004). An older, but equally useful, survey is Lewis Hanke's *Spanish Viceroyalty in America* (Houston, TX: University of St. Thomas, 1972).

³¹ Archivo General de Indias, Escribanía de Cámara 800B, Residencia de Santa Fe, Jorge de Villalonga, Conde de la Cueva, Virrey, Capitán General y Presidente de la Audencia de Santa Fé, 1724.

³² JH Elliott, *Empires of the Atlantic World: Britain and Spain in America, 1492-1830* (Yale University Press, 2006): 126.

the position to which he appointed his nephew – perhaps because the nature of the position meant that the Viceroy would have free reign to engage in contraband trade without risking judicial recriminations. The charges could have been trumped up by a jealous governor who conducted the investigation in order to prevent the recreation of a viceroyalty and overbearing imperial influence in his region. Perhaps the most plausible explanation, however, is that Villalonga's behavior may have been deemed acceptable in the era of the Hapsburgs but flew in the face of the reforming ambitions of the Bourbon monarchs, who saw the nature of his appointment as inappropriate considering the problems of contraband trade along the Spanish Main.

The tenure of Villalonga epitomized the internal logic of the contraband trade in Cartagena which prevented Phillip V's energetic reforms from achieving any level of success. Even the most basic role of the city as a defensive post for the Spanish Navy in the Caribbean was sacrificed for the necessity of conducting trade with foreign merchants. According to the *residencia* cited above, Villalonga was accused of putting the port at risk by using the naval vessels stationed at Cartagena to protect the illicit trade rather than in defense of the port. Interestingly, members of the Spanish Navy in Phillip V's ministry argued ceaselessly for the importance of employing the Navy in defense of legal commerce, especially in the Caribbean – an opinion which Villalonga staunchly opposed during his tenure in New Granada. Arguably, for Villalonga, the increased presence of the Spanish Navy in Caribbean waters would temper the flood of foreign vessels and, thereby, prejudice the economic survival of New Granada. Interestingly, Jamaican officials also railed against the presence and pressures of the Royal Navy and argued that its presence threatened their safety. Not until the disbanding of the

viceroyalty were the Bourbons able to make *guardacostas*, or coastguard vessels, the primary mode of deterrence in the contraband trade.³³ In fact, the aggressive maneuvering of coast guard vessels along the Spanish Main following the disbandment of the first Viceroyalty led directly to the outbreak of the War of Jenkins' Ear.

The disbanding of the first viceregal experiment in New Granada came about due to the continuance of the contraband trade under Villalonga's tenure, despite continued requests from the Council of the Indies to end that trade. After ostensibly refusing to curb smuggling in the port – although what Villalonga could have done about it without increased Spanish commerce remains unclear – “in May, 1722, the Council ordered his dismissal, arrest, and imprisonment and the confiscation of all his property, money, and correspondence.”³⁴ Despite the reforming efforts of the Bourbons, the internal logic of the Caribbean contraband trade continued during the viceregal experiment and after its cessation. The Viceroyalty of New Granada, however, would be recreated during the imperial crisis of the War of Jenkins' Ear in 1739, during which Cartagena served as a particularly valuable and vulnerable port. During the second viceroyalty, the contraband trade continued unabated, yet, the viceroyalty survived, partially due to the second viceroyalty's overriding importance for defense rather than as a method for controlling internal issues of governance.³⁵

The concessions granted to Spain's rivals following the War of Spanish Succession influenced the emphasis the Bourbons placed on reforming trade in Spanish America – especially Britain's attainment of the coveted *asiento* contract. While the

³³ Lance Grahn, *The Political Economy of Smuggling: Regional Economies in Early Bourbon New Granada* (Westview Press, Oxford, 1997): 154.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 115.

³⁵ Juan Manuel Zapatero, *Historia de las Fortalezas de Santa Marta y Estudio Asesor para su Restauración* (Academia Colombiana de Historia, Bogotá, 1980): 130.

asiento naturally allowed for non-Iberian powers to gain some access to Spanish American trade, the British asiento specifically allowed for a 500 ton trade ship to conduct business in Spanish American ports – much to the reluctance of the Bourbons. Accordingly, part of the same reform movement which created a viceroyalty in New Granada also pushed for a regularization of the galleons carrying trade goods across the Atlantic. For the Bourbon monarchs, “Tighter administrative discipline and more effective government were not only required to improve the fiscal yield of colonial treasuries; they were also needed to restart Spain’s transatlantic trade and to rebuff the commercial aggression of its European rivals.”³⁶ For Spain, economic rivalry in the era of the British asiento included officially sanctioned rivalry – thereby creating urgency for the Bourbons to revamp Spanish trade to its colonial port cities.

While Britain attained permission to send a 500 ton trade ship to Spanish American ports, the stipulation that it could only conduct business at the annual trade fairs alongside the Spanish *flotas* was meant to protect the primacy of Spanish merchandise – the trick for the Bourbons, of course, would be to guarantee that Spanish ships arrived in Spanish American ports in step with the British register ship. Accordingly, in 1720, Phillip V issued the *Proyecto de Flotas y Galeones* which clearly delineated the rules for the sailing of Spanish trade ships along with mandating their annual arrival in the Americas. The royal order indicates the dismal condition of Iberian-American trade, but also the reasons why the Bourbon monarch felt that trade had fallen so precipitously. For example, the *Proyecto* stipulated the seasons in which trade vessels could sail from the various ports along with an order for warships to be included in the

³⁶ Anthony McFarlane, *Colombia Before Independence: Economy, Society, and Politics Under Bourbon Rule* (Cambridge University Press, 1993): 191.

fleet.³⁷ Such orders clearly reveal Phillip V's knowledge that the loss of ships through storms or plunder by non-Iberian rivals and the inability of fleets to sail due to endemic warfare in Europe had prejudiced Spain's American trade to the point of abandonment. The preoccupation with the fleet system also indicates a desire to maintain economic hegemony in the Americas in the face of European challengers. In the early decades of the eighteenth century, Phillip V's reform efforts accomplished very little to curb the illegal smuggling voyages of non-Iberian powers into Spanish America, even as the regularity of the fleet system improved for a short period. The increased pressure to curb the ventures of foreign contrabandists in the markets of New Granada coupled with several notable outrages committed by British merchants in Spanish America eventually pushed the two crowns to war.

³⁷ Mueso Naval de Madrid, No. inventario: 5279, Signatura: 4388, "*Proyecto Para Galeones, Y Flotas, de el Peru, Y Nueva España, Y Para Navios de Registro, Y Avisos Que Navegaron A Ambos Reynos*", 1720

CHAPTER THREE

BRIBERY, HERESY, AND MURDER:

TENSIONS ESCALATE

As the British and Spanish crowns respectively pressured Jamaican interlopers and royal officials in Cartagena to eliminate the rampant smuggling occurring across the Caribbean Sea, the British asiento contract opened up new methods for conducting that contraband trade. Carrying trade goods into Spanish American ports under the guise of the asiento contract became an effective means of avoiding imperial sanctions – even as the continued contraband trade pushed Britain and Spain closer to the War of Jenkins’ Ear and the end of the asiento period. Considering the importance of the contraband trade for the Caribbean economy, however, it is little wonder that it became an unstoppable juggernaut which eventually pushed the region into war. The contraband trade, “Although illegal, it demonstrated the institution of ‘freedom of trade in a non-mercantilist way,’ that is, an American identity vis-a-vis an imperial expectation. Contraband was, quite simply, a central feature of early eighteenth century consumerism in all three Caribbean provinces.”¹ Although the centrality of the contraband trade is indisputable for the eighteenth-century Caribbean, this chapter will analyze not simply how the trade operated and who was involved, but also the dramatic events and tensions which would lead to war.

¹ Lance Grahn, *The Political Economy of Smuggling: Regional Economies in Early Bourbon New Granada* (Westview Press, Oxford, 1997): 4

The logistics of setting up a transatlantic slave trade which supplied factories across the Americas required the South Sea Company to expand into a proto-international corporation with a veritable army of employees responsible for the maintenance of the Company's business. While the Royal African Company eked out a minor subsistence along the African coast and in the British Isles, its counterpart developed factories across the Atlantic World, fanning out along the African coast, throughout the British Caribbean, and into most major Spanish American ports. In order to supply the Spanish American market, the South Sea Company operated factories in Cartagena, Buenos Aires, Vera Cruz, Havana, Santiago de Cuba, Porto Bello, Panama, and, eventually, Caracas. Despite the high demand for slaves and guaranteed price set by the *asiento* contract, "the staffing of these factories was not cheap" and the South Sea Company rarely turned a profit during the years under which it operated.² Where profits were made, however, was for the individual factors stationed throughout the Atlantic World, due in part to their high salaries but also to their involvement in the contraband economy in Spanish America.

The factories themselves often served as a means for the introduction of contraband goods into Spanish American markets. For the appalling logistics of trading in human beings, the factories in Spanish America required the constant importation of foodstuffs. This need was especially heightened because, "A serious attempt was generally made to feed them well in order to build up their resistance to disease and make them more salable. Their diet was similar to that in the islands and on shipboard: beef,

² Colin Palmer, *Human Cargoes: The British Slave Trade to Spanish America, 1700-1739* (University of Illinois Press, 1981): 60

fish, rice, bread, flour, and bananas.”³ While some of those items could be purchased in Spanish America, for factories like the one in Cartagena, the cost of flour and rice from Spanish providers was generally prohibitive – resulting in their supply arriving from British North America via Jamaica.

The shortage of European comestibles in New Granada opened an enormous market for contraband flour – a need met throughout the eighteenth century by foreign suppliers. While the environs of New Granada provided abundant sources of foodstuffs, wheat was not an especially productive crop in the tropical lowland regions where large urban populations resided. Additionally, places in the interior where wheat could be successfully cultivated were often located in challenging terrain. This resulted in the inability of domestic wheat farmers to furnish major port cities such as Cartagena with flour.⁴ The factories’ legitimate and legal need for wheat brought contraband flour into Spanish American port cities, where South Sea Company agents could profit from their surplus.

In fact, the demand for flour in Spanish American port cities linked them to Jamaica, and through the Jamaican connection to the mainland colonies, British North America. Market farmers in places like Pennsylvania, New York, and Carolina provided Jamaican slave merchants with comestibles for their domestic populations with enough left over to engage in a vigorous trade with the Spanish Main. According to Jamaican Governor Lawes:

We have a frequent intercourse of trade with the Plantations on the Continent of North America, vizt. from New York, they bring us flower, staves, pitch and starr etc., from Virginia the product of

³ Ibid., 69

⁴ Museo Naval de Madrid, Signatura 14502 BMN, *Diccionario geográfico-histórico de las indias occidentales o Americanas*

that country, Pensilvania flower etc., Carolina rice, pork, flower etc., New England and Philadelphia lumber of all sorts; in return whereof to all the above-named places we send them most, partly rum and sugar and mony, and the commodities we have from foreign Plantations is chiefly gold and silver, cochineal, logwood and other dying woods, mules, coacoa etc., which is in return to negroes and all other European commodities, but more particularly Brittish manufactors which we send them(sic).⁵

Such a hemispheric trade defied the principles of mercantilism but was essential for the commercial success of the various regions of the Americas – especially providing a lucrative outlet for North America's foodstuffs.

The involvement of South Sea Company agents in the contraband flour trade came to the attention of Spanish colonial officials in a variety of ways. For some officials, the mere bulk of the flour shipments arriving at the factories was enough to warrant further examination. One such shipment, from a British vessel named the *Union*, aroused the suspicion of port officials. The *Union* arrived in Cartagena in 1735 with forty-four barrels of flour – apparently a high enough number to lead Governor Antonio de Salas to write a strongly worded letter to the King, condemning the participation of South Sea Company agents in the contraband trade.⁶ In a twist which highlights the dilemma in which Spanish officials found themselves, the South Sea Company agents petitioned Salas's administration to allow the sale of the flour because it was in danger of spoiling – a petition to which Salas acquiesced. The dearth of flour in Cartagena meant that Salas could not risk simply letting the flour spoil, despite the illicit nature of its introduction. Ostensibly, the *Union* brought the flour to the South Sea Company factors in Cartagena for sale in the contraband market and, yet, when caught with the barrels,

⁵ CSP, no. 479 (1719-20): 278.

⁶ Archivo General de Indias, Santa Fe, 1167, April 1736

those same factors were able to earn a profit – freed from recriminations because of the legal demands of the factory and lack of flour in the city.

While the shipment of flour received from the *Union* may have exceeded a reasonable amount for any factory, the importation of comestibles to replenish South Sea Company factories was in itself legal. The demand for wheat, therefore, provided a cover for British merchants to smuggle more profitable items into Spanish American markets via the South Sea Company's factories. While the city of Cartagena suffered from a dearth of wheat flour, the elites of the city also faced shortages of the latest fashions. Products such as Brittany linen came into high demand in eighteenth century Cartagena and served as a profitable item for smugglers with legal trade connections to Britain. While illicit textiles sold for 25 to 30 percent less than those which arrived through legal channels, Jamaican interlopers still risked seizure in order to sell their wares for specie.⁷ One such Jamaican, Samuel Collet, sailed to Havana in 1722 under contract to supply the South Sea Company factory there with wheat. Upon arrival, however, Spanish officials inspected his cargo and discovered, buried in the flour, bolts of fabric, wool, and silk thread. Collet claimed to have no prior knowledge of the illicit articles and blamed their presence on a mariner named Thomas English who had been responsible for loading the vessel.⁸ Without the conclusion of Collet's trial, what became of the unfortunate Jamaican remains obscure but, clearly, the returns for smuggling were high enough to warrant the risk.

⁷ Lance Grahn, *The Political Economy of Smuggling: Regional Economies in Early Bourbon New Granada* (Westview Press, Oxford, 1997): 102

⁸ Archivo de Indias, Contaduría 268, No. 1:5, "*Testimonio de autos de la aprehension de 4 barriles de medias y botones en la balandra La Jamaica*"

Whether or not the South Sea Company factory in Havana was complicit in Samuel Collet's ill-fated smuggling attempt due to his status as an independent captain on contract or not, cases of employees of the company involving themselves in the contraband trade are hardly scarce. Agents of the Company engaged in all manner of trade in Spanish America, seeking out profit through licit and illicit means. Interestingly, historian Colin Palmer argues that, "There can be no doubt that the Royal African Company began to carry on contraband trade with the Spaniards shortly after it was chartered in 1672. The South Sea Company, however, was not tempted to engage in the illegal trade, probably because it never had slaves left over after its annual contractual obligations were filled."⁹ Palmer argues that the South Sea Company did not smuggle slaves into Spanish America while their counterpart, the Royal African Company, did in the years before the South Sea Company attained the *asiento* contract. While it may be true that the South Sea Company faced continual challenges meeting their contractual obligations, agents of the Company did in fact engage in widespread contraband trading – at times even of slaves, which Palmer seems to argue were in prohibitively short supply.

As discussed previously, Jamaican merchants reacted to the hegemony of the South Sea Company by engaging in their own contraband slave trade – using the "refuse" slaves left in Jamaica by the Company. South Sea Company employees, however, also smuggled slaves into Spanish America by bribing local officials, such as the port master or, even, the viceroy, into allowing a certain number of slaves into the port without reporting them and, therefore, not taxing their entry. According to the observations of Juan and Ulloa:

⁹ Colin Palmer, *Human Cargoes: The British Slave Trade to Spanish America, 1700-1739* (University of Illinois Press, 1981): 88

The same method involved in trading smuggled goods is used for Negro slaves. When the *asiento* ships reach Portobelo, a small number of Negroes come in legally and are sold in the official slave market, but a considerably larger number enter illegally. As for smuggled goods, one must always pay a bribe of so much per head, just as one pays so much per *fardo*.¹⁰ If this is done, one never has any difficulty bringing in whatever he wishes. In fact, it is just as easy as legal trade.¹¹

Although Juan and Ulloa discuss Portobelo above, the implications that the South Sea Company did in fact engage in contraband trading, even in slaves, appears obvious. Additionally, if contraband slave trading occurred in Portobelo, it may be assumed that the same behavior would be prevalent in the port of Cartagena.

The extreme shortage of slaves in Spanish America guaranteed contraband slave traders a handsome profit, even after paying the necessary bribes. The South Sea Company itself had a stake in smuggling slaves during this period, due in large part to the stipulations of their contract. As mentioned earlier, the Company paid a tax on all slaves introduced to Spanish America up to 4,000 *piezas*, after which they were allowed to bring in another 800 *piezas* duty free. While Palmer argues effectively that the Company never met their contractual obligations, his argument that this meant they did not engage in the contraband slave trade ignores that the introduction of any number below 4,000 meant the payment of a duty – therefore, if the Company never came close to meeting its obligations, smuggling slaves in and avoiding the duty made more financial sense than legally introducing 3,999 *piezas*. For their part, the investment strategies of many Spanish officials who purchased their posts in Spanish America encouraged the accumulation of wealth, even through accepting bribes from British merchants.

¹⁰ *Fardo* refers to a bundle or a bale of a particular good.

¹¹ Jorge Juan and Antonio de Ulloa, *Discourse and Political Reflections on the Kingdoms of Peru* (University of Oklahoma Press, 1978): 49

While employees of the South Sea Company engaged in contraband slave trading, the archival record also abounds with examples of their involvement in the smuggling of trade goods to Spanish American ports – far above that legally stipulated by the *asiento* contract. For example, on April 9th, 1723, the packetboat *Asiento* was detained in Havana and the captain and pilot of the vessel taken in for questioning by Spanish officials on the island. Captain Alexander Gordon faced accusations of delivering a number of legal and registered slaves to Havana, leaving the harbor, but returning to a more private location in order to smuggle more slaves into the South Sea Company's factory without reporting them. Additionally, the packetboat was found to contain a large quantity of contraband clothing – Gordon claimed to be ignorant of the clothing and, instead, blamed the pilot, Samuel Hearn, whom he claimed was responsible for loading the vessel. Both men were found guilty and the clothing and slaves were confiscated and the men were released. Despite the verdict, however, by the 7th of February, 1724, both Captain Gordon and the packetboat *Asiento* were back to ferrying slaves across the Caribbean Sea – delivering 136 *piezas de Indias* to Cartagena and returning on the 20th of that same month with 144 *piezas*. Even Gordon's scapegoat, the pilot Samuel Hearn, reappeared as a captain of his own vessel in 1730, delivering 146 $\frac{3}{4}$ *piezas*, also to Cartagena.¹² The return of men involved in smuggling so soon after their indictment seemingly indicates, at the very least, a tacit approval with contraband trading on the part of the South Sea Company – if not outright support for the activities of Gordon and Hearn as well as the inability of officials in Havana to punish the men with more than just the confiscation of their goods.

South Sea Company merchants and Jamaican interlopers did not rely solely on the efficacy of bribery as a means of introducing illicit goods. For many non-Iberian vessels,

¹² Archivo General de Indias, Contaduría 268, No. 1:5

feigning distress gained them access to Spanish American ports, from whence they clandestinely delivered their cargo before port officials could inspect the ship's hold. An eighteenth-century priest by the name of Don Antonio Julián traveled extensively throughout New Granada and recorded his observations as a call to arms to the Spanish King against the illegal actions of British merchants in Spanish American ports. According to Julián, "the other manner of introducing illicitly, is entering with total liberty to the same ports with a title of needing protection from a storm, to collect fresh water, to get provisions; and overall when the anchor is secure in port, by various and subtle methods, they go and introduce produce around the City."¹³ While feigning distress was periodically utilized by merchants under the employ of the South Sea Company, it was a preferred method for independent smugglers. British ships not engaged in the *asiento* contract only received entrance into Spanish American ports in cases of dire emergency under the assumption that Spanish vessels could expect reciprocal treatment in British American ports. Contraband traders, however, used this to their advantage in smuggling illicit slaves and trade goods past Spanish coast guard vessels.

While contraband traders were active throughout Spanish America, and Jamaicans particularly active in Caribbean ports such as Havana and Cartagena, the latter's propensity for relatively open trade with foreigners attracted a plethora of non-Iberian merchants. In a letter to the King, royal official Juan Pablo de Ibarra expressed his intense dismay at the situation on the ground in Cartagena and its environs. Ibarra writes, "they are unloading just the same their types of clothing and Aguardiente at whatever

¹³ Antonio Julián, S.J. *La Perla de la América, Provincia de Santa Marta (Edición facsimilar)* (Academia Colombiana de Historia, Bogotá, 1980): 252 - Translation is my own.

time of the day or night, and go through with them to the streets of this city,” where, he argues, contraband traders basically engaged in open commerce with total impunity.¹⁴ As Ibarra, writing in the years following the fall of the first Viceroyalty, demonstrates, the internal necessity of the contraband trade in Cartagena was such that smugglers operated openly, day or night, and engaged in widespread commerce throughout the city. Mostly, this reflects the utter lack of licit trade options in the eighteenth-century Spanish Caribbean, but certainly, it also reflects the tacit approval which smugglers expected from local officials – an approval which largely, before and after the fall of the first Viceroyalty, they got. As will be seen, however, the environs around Cartagena made policing the contraband trade exceedingly difficult, especially in the region to the northeast of the city, an area completely controlled by the independent Guajiro Indians – whose involvement in the contraband trade made them both irritating in the eyes of Spanish authorities and valuable allies to the British seeking to tap the profitable markets of the Spanish Main.

The regional autonomy of New Granada contributed to the prevalence of illicit activity in the environs of Cartagena. Perhaps no region contributed more to the contraband trade in New Granada than the Guajiro Peninsula in the viceroyalty’s northeast. As Grahn describes, “peculiar to Riohacha and its regional informal economy, the numerous coves and anchorages of the Guajiro peninsula were controlled by clans of unpacified Guajiro Indians who detested most Spaniards but willingly traded with

¹⁴ Archivo General de Indias, Santa Fe 1233, Letter from Juan Pablo de Ibarra to the King, August 1727 – translation is my own

foreigners.”¹⁵ The ability for Guajiro Indian groups to maintain their autonomy, in fact, depended on their involvement in the contraband trade with non-Iberian powers.

Yet, despite repeated efforts by royal authorities in New Granada in 1578, 1616, 1718, and 1760 to pacify the Guajiros, the entire peninsula tenaciously clung to its autonomy – aided, again, to a large extent by their trade relationship with outside merchants, especially with the introduction of British weapons. Perhaps the most extreme example of the kind of autonomy enjoyed by the Guajiros can be demonstrated by examining the ill-fated attempt to pacify the region during the second viceroyalty. In an attempt to eliminate the overwhelming influx of contraband into New Granada, Viceroy Pedro Messía de la Cerda sent armed soldiers into the region in 1771 in order to definitively pacify the Guajiros. In total, Messía sent in a contingent of 1,000 armed soldiers. Upon arrival, however, field commander Colonel Benito Encio encountered a force of between 7,000 to 10,000 Guajiro Indians. Not only was the Spanish contingent numerically overwhelmed but the Guajiros were additionally, “armed with superior British guns.”¹⁶ In the face of such intimidating resistance, Encio fled the front, claiming that the expense and loss of life required to pacify the Guajiros were beyond what the viceroyalty was capable of supporting – thereby permitting the continued involvement of the Guajiro Peninsular in the contraband trade. Even earlier pushes to pacify the Guajiros were likewise thwarted by the superiority of the Indians’ British weapons. In addition to the prevalence of contraband trade, the relationship maintained between the Guajiro Indians and British merchants strained an already tense relationship between the Spanish and British crowns.

¹⁵ Lance Grahn, *The Political Economy of Smuggling: Regional Economies in Early Bourbon New Granada* (Westview Press, Oxford, 1997): 28.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 40.

In the years leading up to the War of Jenkins' Ear, almost continual conflicts erupted between Spanish coastguards and the British merchants of the South Sea Company. Several instances regarding conflicts of faith raise interesting questions about the role of authorities of the Inquisition in transimperial trade. Although allowed to remain Protestant during their tenure in the South Sea Company's factories, the presence of British Protestants in Spanish America irked religious authorities who began to express growing resentment and grievances to the crown regarding their "heretical" neighbors. As early as 1716, Inquisition officials rallied against the deleterious effect of Protestants in their Catholic realm. In a letter to the King, the Inquisitor of Cartagena, don Thomas Gutierrez Escalante, expressed a growing concern that the mere presence of Protestantism in Cartagena was undermining the Catholic faith. He argued that the British merchants wished to subvert the tenets of the Catholicism in Spanish America and that the King should put the interests of the church before economic interests – an aggressive moral argument which, largely, fell on deaf ears.¹⁷

For Inquisitor Gutierrez, the presence of a South Sea Company factory in the city of Cartagena came with an unreasonable number of Protestants. His complaints to the crown illustrate the typical staffing of a factory in the eighteenth century as well as the reaction to that factory amongst ecclesiastic authorities in Spanish America. According to Gutierrez, the Cartagena factory was dangerously overstaffed and the factors regularly mixed with what he saw as his Catholic followers. Through an interrogation of an Irish priest, Andres Linje, Gutierrez claimed that the factory housed eleven men – a number in excess of the mandated six. In addition, a small population of expatriates had set up shop

¹⁷ Archivo Histórico Nacional, Inquisición, 1605, EXP.13, Letter from Inquisitor don Thomas Guterrez Escalante to the King, July 7, 1716

in Cartagena, including an Englishwoman who owned a bodega in the city and apparently kept close ties with the South Sea Company factors. After pressuring the crown to remedy the situation, Gutierrez was able to force the principal factor, James Pim, to choose six men to remain in the factory and send the rest home. The Englishwoman remained in Cartagena, however, claiming to be Catholic – a move which seemed to evoke hostility from Gutierrez who, nonetheless, allowed her to remain.¹⁸

International pressure regarding the asiento contract escalated during the 1730s. Although the activities of smugglers in undermining licit Spanish-American commerce occupy the majority of official complaints against the South Sea Company, ecclesiastic authorities documented the daily frictions which abounded between Protestants and Catholics – a friction brought to royal attention and only compounding the tensions between the two crowns. Throughout the Spanish American port cities that housed factories, Inquisition officials sent a flurry of correspondence across the Atlantic expressing their extreme distaste for the Anglo-Spanish trade and, at times, winning small victories against those factories. British factor John Reis came to the attention of Inquisition authorities in Cartagena for allegedly convincing a Catholic woman in Havana that Mary did not experience Immaculate Conception but, rather, was physically impregnated. By 1733, after examining the case for several years, Inquisitor Don Manuel de Verdeja Cossio forced the removal of Reis, who was never allowed to return to Spanish America.¹⁹

¹⁸ Archivo Histórico Nacional, Inquisición, 1605, EXP.13, Letter from Inquisitor don Thomas Guterrez Escalante to the King, July 7, 1716

¹⁹ Archivo Histórico Nacional, Inquisition 1599, Exp.14, Testimonio from the Inquisition of Cartagena, 1733.

While the majority of conflicts cited by ecclesiastic authorities in Spanish America revolved around “heretical” behavior on the part of South Sea Company agents, the veritable cold war between the Inquisition and the British factors sometimes turned hot. As Spain ramped up coastguard patrols throughout Spanish America to police the contraband trade, the South Sea Company factory in Veracruz faced a crisis of its own – one which threatened the very existence of the factory. On the night of the 25th of July, 1729, a Dominican priest and a small entourage of residents of Veracruz approached the South Sea Company factory to pay the factors there a visit, friendly according to the testimony of the Spanish residents involved. According to the Inquisition records, as the group approached the factory in the dark, shots were fired and the Dominican priest fell dead. The man who fired the fatal shots, William Booth, claimed that he did not recognize the priest and fired on the group in self-defense, assuming that they were approaching the factory in order to rob it. For his complicity in the murder, Booth was sentenced to five years hard labor in North Africa – a veritable death sentence for the factor. The incident sparked outrage in the community around Veracruz, and only with smooth negotiation by Benjamin Keene, the British Ambassador to Spain, was the factory allowed to remain in the city.²⁰

From the Inquisition’s records of the event, the behavior of Booth and the other factors at Veracruz appears somewhat vicious and completely unreasonable. The Dominican priest seems the innocent victim of senseless violence perpetrated by “heretical” British merchants. A letter from James Moriarty to Captain John Van Horn in March of 1727, however, could possibly cast Booth in a different light. Moriarty wrote to Van Horn in order to give him instructions on how to run the Santa Marta factory in his

²⁰ Archivo General de Indias, Indiferente General 2808, Mexico, 22 of March, 1730.

absence. In one section of the extensive instructions, Moriarty tells Van Horn, “You are to be vigilant at night that the house be not robbed, there being even attempts of that kind already made since I have come into it, which I prevented by rounding the house armed at different times of the night.”²¹ Moriarty’s letter could explain the events in Veracruz on July 25th – especially assuming that Veracruz was also subject to being robbed in the same way that Moriarty claims occurred in Santa Marta. The presence of armed men surrounding the factories throughout the night at Spanish American factories and the eruption of violence in Veracruz hint at the daily tensions between residents of Spanish American cities and South Sea Company factories which existed throughout the *asiento* period.

While the incident at Veracruz certainly cannot be considered typical, Moriarty’s instructions to arm guards may indicate a more widespread issue of security for South Sea Company factors. The prevalence of contraband trade, either conducted by factors themselves or blamed on the company, and the issues of religious conflict represent the mounting tensions of the late 1720s and early 1730s, tensions which would erupt into conflict by the latter end of that period. Despite the economic necessity of the slave trade to Spanish America, the diplomats who worked ceaselessly to keep trade running smoothly between the two empires, and the clearly delineated rules of the *asiento* contract itself, conflict between the two crowns seemed inevitable. As *guardacostas* patrolled Spanish American waters in increasing numbers, and legitimate *asiento* vessels were taken as prizes, the Caribbean of the mid-eighteenth century was theater to daily skirmishes – including one between Master Robert Jenkins and Captain Juan de León

²¹ Archivo General de Indias, Indiferente General 2808, Letter from James Moriarty to Captain John Van Horn, March 1727.

Fandiño that would bring the Spanish and British to blows, with drastic consequences for trade in the coming decades.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE EAR COMES OFF

By the middle of the 1730s, the coveted asiento contract that Great Britain had won only through their involvement in armed conflict seemed more burdensome than profitable. For Spain, the supply of slaves their colonies received from the South Sea Company barely made up for the political and economic problems that accompanied the trade. Throughout the decade, both sides proposed several methods for the legal cessation of the contract even while mounting tensions seemed to make the outbreak of the War of Jenkins' Ear almost inevitable. As complaints over contraband and heretical activities plagued South Sea Company factories, those same merchants leveled diatribes against the Spanish coastguard for their aggressions against legal asiento vessels. While the war itself has tended to fall into historical obscurity next to more momentous conflicts such as the Seven Years' War and the American Revolution, the War of Jenkins' Ear set precedents that would be more fully realized in the latter conflicts of the eighteenth century. The loss of Jenkins' ear and the declaration of war also sounded the death knell for the South Sea Company's involvement in trade with Spanish America – opening the doors for private traders to inundate Spanish American ports more fully than their corporate antecedents. The eruption of full-scale war in the Caribbean as well as the consequences of that conflict for Jamaica and Cartagena will be the focus of this chapter.

As tensions between South Sea Company factors and Spanish coastguards and officials escalated throughout the Spanish American world, Spanish and British negotiators struggled ceaselessly to reach a compromise that would allow the asiento contract to proceed. Both sides of the negotiating table understood the basic problems regarding the trade – rampant abuse of the asiento contract by the South Sea Company, the inability of Spanish merchants to meet colonial demands, and officially sanctioned harassment of British shipping were at least some of the key issues that Thomas Geraldino, the Spanish agent in London, and Benjamin Keene, the British ambassador in Madrid, attempted to work through in the middle years of the 1730s. The most pressing issues for Keene regarded the aggressive nature of Spanish coastal patrols coupled with the large amount of debt owed to the South Sea Company from individual Spanish American buyers.

The various abuses of the asiento contract which the South Sea Company and private British traders engaged in came to the full attention of the crown through the complaints of royal officials charged with curbing that contraband. As a means of dealing with what seemed like total disregard for trade laws, especially after the disbanding of the first viceroyalty, Philip V turned to policing the coast more vigorously. Traditional Anglo-Spanish animosities coupled with the permission of the king to engage in aggressive raids of ships which possibly contained contraband, however, meant that guardacostas made a habit of harassing all ships flying the Union Jack – even when their destination was not Spanish held territory. Above all, the presence of Spanish pirates engaged in the defense of the coast, a policy which harkens back to the initial years of British Jamaican defense, outraged British merchants on both sides of the Atlantic. In

fact, “the presence of outlaws on the high seas and the failure of the Spanish government to curb their depredations allowed the company to question whether the Spaniards were seriously interested in the fulfillment of the asiento contract.”¹ The aggressive nature of Spanish vessels in the Caribbean led directly to the aforementioned encounter between Master Jenkins and Captain Fandiño, yet theirs is only the most famous of a barrage of belligerent sea-raids which Spanish vessels engaged in with the complicity of their monarch.

For the South Sea Company, and the British Empire as a whole, the asiento contract promised access to the profitable and closed markets of Spanish America. As discussed previously, the promise of access to those markets came mostly through the clause in the contract which allowed for an annual permission ship to attend the trade fairs. In reality, however, warfare and Spanish political maneuvering prevented many of the planned permission ships from ever reaching Spanish America – much to the consternation of South Sea Company officials in London. At times, warfare simply prevented the permission ship from crossing the Atlantic while, at other points, Spanish officials refused to disclose when the trade fair was taking place until it had already passed. Perhaps the most irksome practice, however, occurred when Spanish officials prohibited the permission ship from sailing due to the fact that the markets in the Americas were already saturated with contraband trade – sometimes carried by the Company but often shuttled across the Caribbean by Jamaican interlopers. In fact, during

¹ Colin Palmer, *Human Cargoes: The British Slave Trade to Spanish America, 1700-1739* (University of Illinois Press, 1981): 134.

the period of the asiento contract, only eight permission ships conducted business in the Americas.²

Despite the fabled wealth of Spanish America, many port cities in which the South Sea Company conducted business fell into deep debt to the Company. In the early years of the asiento contract, issues arose between the South Sea Company and Jamaican planters regarding the purchase of slaves for currency or on credit – with the Company preferring to conduct business in Spanish America due to the abundance of specie. By the 1730s, however, the situation in some parts of Spanish America had drastically changed. Exemplary of this, “By 1735 Cartagena debtors alone owed the company 166,000 pesos, forcing the South Sea Company to consider relinquishing its trade prerogatives in the West Indies well before the War of Jenkins’ Ear erupted in 1739.”³ Occasionally these debtors were slave merchants who bought the slaves on the coast and then peddled the human captives throughout the interior or they were also often wealthy individuals who bought slaves for their homes or to send out in gangs to pan for gold in the interior regions of the Chocó.⁴ Without the promised profits of the annual permission ships, with growing debt in Spanish America, and with the aggressive raids of Spanish guardacoastas and privateers throughout the Caribbean, the future of the asiento contract seemed uncertain at best as Ambassador Keene and the Spanish agent Geraldino approached the negotiating table in order to prevent the outbreak of war.

For the Spanish representative, the issues regarding the asiento contract revolved entirely around the abuses perpetrated by the South Sea Company and its agents – abuses

² Ibid., 135.

³ Lance Grahn, *The Political Economy of Smuggling: Regional Economies in Early Bourbon New Granada* (Westview Press, Oxford, 1997): 127.

⁴ William Frederick Sharp, *Slavery on the Spanish Frontier: The Colombian Chocó 1680-1810* (University of Oklahoma Press, Norman, 1976): 36.

which, if they could be remedied, would provide for the continuance of the contract. The Spanish agent in London, Geraldino, proposed two effective solutions to curb some of the contraband in which the Company engaged, remembering, of course, that the Company received the blame for all British contraband trade conducted along the Spanish Main despite the prevalence of private interlopers. While Geraldino recognized that the issues regarding contraband in the Caribbean far exceeded his ability to resolve them, he chose two specific issues which would curb at least some of that illicit commerce, especially the amount carried by the Company. As will be seen, however, the energetic reforms proposed by Geraldino were too little, and came too late.

The South Sea Company actively engaged in both the smuggling of provisions into Spanish American markets and entering harbors under the pretense of the *asiento* contract with a ship loaded with trade goods and only a couple of slaves. In 1733, Geraldino aggressively took issue with these two particular abuses, issuing new regulations regarding the conduct of trade. He, “ordered in the king’s name that all provisions carried by the slave ships for the use of the slaves should be secured in a magazine having three different locks. The keys to two of the locks would be held by two different royal officials; the third key would be kept by a company agent.”⁵ In this way, in order for the slaves’ provisions to be sold into the contraband marketplace, the complicity of all three key holders would be required. Geraldino also mandated that no *asiento* ships be allowed in Spanish American ports unless they contained a complete load of slaves which he defined as “a ratio of four slaves to every five tons of a ship’s

⁵ Colin Palmer, *Human Cargoes: The British Slave Trade to Spanish America, 1700-1739* (University of Illinois Press, 1981): 137.

burden; thus a ship weighing one hundred tons was supposed to carry eighty slaves.”⁶

The outbreak of war, however, prevented Geraldino from determining the efficacy of his reforms, while escalating tensions may have prevented their very implementation.

While the removal of Master Jenkins’ ear in 1731 sparked outrage in Great Britain and pity amongst the Parliament members who witnessed his testimony, it would take years of merchant agitation against Spanish naval aggressions to tip the scales to war. While the British Prime Minister, Robert Walpole, argued vociferously for the maintenance of peace, the merchant lobby, whose losses in the Caribbean augmented daily, continually pushed for war in order to redress their grievances.⁷ Despite the agitation of the merchant community, Walpole was able to organize a last ditch effort to maintain peace through a series of hasty negotiations. However, in July 1739, the negotiations were broken off and George II declared war on October 19.⁸ The War of Jenkins’ Ear merged into the larger War of Austrian Succession and raged for nearly a decade before a shaky treaty would be signed at Aix-la-Chapelle in 1748. One particular incident during the conflict, however, encapsulates the legacy of commercial relations between Jamaica and Cartagena throughout the eighteenth century and serves as an appropriate conclusion for this study – that being, the invasion of Cartagena.

While the purpose of the first Viceroyalty of New Granada centered on curbing the depredations of foreign merchants, the second resurgence of that viceroyalty revolved around providing defense for the Spanish Main’s most important port city – Cartagena. The looming conflict with Great Britain along with the vulnerability of the Spanish Main

⁶ Ibid., 137.

⁷ Edward W. Lawson, “What Became of the Man Who Cut Off Jenkins’ Ear,” *The Florida Historical Quarterly*, 37, No.1 (July, 1958): 34.

⁸ Charles E. Nowell, “The Defense of Cartagena,” *The Hispanic American Historical Review*, 42, No. 4 (Nov., 1962): 481.

to assault led to the proposed recreation of the Viceroyalty of New Granada.⁹ This time, however, the post of Viceroy would be assigned to a young graduate from the *Academia Militar de Matemáticas* in Barcelona, Sebastián de Eslava, who, upon his arrival, immediately set about preparing the city for its defense. Eslava would be aided, and at times come into conflict with, Spain's most celebrated naval veteran, Blas de Lezo. The combined skill of both men coupled with Cartagena's easily defensible harbor would be needed in order to counter the threat looming across the Caribbean.

British strategy in the Caribbean during the initial years of the War of Jenkins' Ear did, in fact, center on placing the well-fortified Cartagena under siege. In order to guarantee success in the operation and strike what was perceived as a fatal blow to Spanish America, Admiral Edward Vernon amassed the largest amphibious force to date to assault the city. In fact, according to Grahn, "Vernon struck at Cartagena with 21 warships, 170 transports, and 23,000 men. Blas de Lezo and Sebastián Eslava, who jointly directed the defense of the city, had only 18 vessels at most and just 3,000 troops with which to counter the invasion force."¹⁰ As a precedent for the involvement of the North American continent in later eighteenth-century wars, Vernon also counted 3,600 North American soldiers from Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia, and North Carolina among his regiments.¹¹

Despite Vernon's numerical superiority – with superiority being understood as an understatement – the disease environment of the Caribbean took an immediate toll. The

⁹ Ibid., 478.

¹⁰ Lance Grahn, *The Political Economy of Smuggling: Regional Economies in Early Bourbon New Granada* (Westview Press, Oxford, 1997): 167.

¹¹ Charles E. Nowell, "The Defense of Cartagena," *The Hispanic American Historical Review*, 42, No. 4 (Nov., 1962): 486.

troops and the fleet arranged to rendezvous on the island of Jamaica before proceeding on to the assault of Cartagena. For many of the troops, however, their hiatus in Jamaica proved disastrous and many succumbed to fever or sickened themselves on the island's plentiful supply of rum.¹² The disease environment of tropical Cartagena was no improvement to that of Jamaica, between disease and mismanagement of such a large force on the part of Vernon and Brigadier General Thomas Wentworth, the British force was repulsed by a much smaller Spanish defense. Perhaps the most notable casualty on the side of the Spanish was the lamentable loss of Lezo, who died of wounds received during the siege.

An emphasis on metropolitan concerns regarding the tactical maneuvering of Vernon or the defensive capabilities of Lezo, however, ignores a more intriguing question about the role of contraband trade during the conflict. Despite the fact that it was the transatlantic pressures regarding contraband trade that led directly to the War of Jenkins' Ear, the trade networks established throughout the early decades of the eighteenth century would maintain their prominence during the war years. As Lezo built up defenses around Cartagena, he also purchased vast amounts of foodstuffs and supplies from Jamaican merchants in order to prepare for the imminent siege building up on that same island. In fact, "Ironically, it was an English frigate loaded with flour for the Cartagena squadron that brought the first news to the port of the king's intended declaration of war and of the buildup of the Jamaican fleet."¹³ The pressure of increased numbers of defenders in Cartagena, coupled with a complete lack of domestic sources, required officials to seek

¹² Ibid., 487.

¹³ Lance Grahn, *The Political Economy of Smuggling: Regional Economies in Early Bourbon New Granada* (Westview Press, Oxford, 1997): 176.

supplies of foodstuffs from the very island where the British invaders were busy sickening themselves on Jamaica's rum supply.

Throughout the eighteenth century, Cartagena depended on the introduction of comestibles and basic trade goods from their British counterparts in the Caribbean, with the period of the War of Jenkins' Ear being no exception. As imperial negotiators, military planners, and royal advisors devised, schemed, and argued about an appropriate policy to end the illegal activity prevalent between Spanish and British subjects in the Americas, residents of Jamaica and Cartagena adopted the only workable solution – trade. Lezo's fleet of eighteen ships defending the port received their naval stores from Jamaican interlopers, the soldiers stationed in forts all along the Spanish Main fed on flour imported by Jamaicans, and the terrified residents of Cartagena waited for the siege to end dressed in Brittany linens. The various accusations of corruption, invectives about abuses of the asiento contract, or appeals made for more supplies made little difference on the ground as the subjects of disparate empires developed their own means of survival and economic success.

The War of Jenkins' Ear brought to a close the South Sea Company's involvement in the asiento contract. The Company never recovered its economic preeminence and its collapse would bring about an economic and political scandal which reverberated throughout Britain for the next decade. The demise of the South Sea Company also marked the end of a distinct era of economic policy in transatlantic trade. By the conclusion of the war, "The chartered company was fast becoming a commercial anachronism; the age of the energetic private trader was at hand."¹⁴ Private traders,

¹⁴ Colin Palmer, *Human Cargoes: The British Slave Trade to Spanish America, 1700-1739* (University of Illinois Press, 1981): 158.

including those of Jamaica who had caused so many problems for the South Sea Company, would continue both the African slave trade to Spanish America as well as the illicit inter-American trade to Cartagena. In fact, the commercial relationship between Jamaica and Cartagena continued in the decades after the War of Jenkins' Ear, slowing only at the conclusion of the eighteenth century as the American Revolution cut Jamaica off from its former supply of comestibles and as the island's sugar economy in the wake of the Haitian Revolution eclipsed all other economic activity.

CONCLUSION

While this study explores the relationship between imperial expectations and colonial realities through the lens of contraband trade in the Caribbean, it is by no means comprehensive in its coverage. There are glaring gaps in the scholarship which have hampered my attempts to elucidate the multitudinous nuances of the interimperial economic connections in the Americas. Constraints on both time and resources can also account for some of the places in this study where more work remains to be done.

Primarily, the role of Spanish merchants in the Americas is almost entirely absent from the present study – their absence here is obviously not an indication of their absence in either Spanish America or the Iberian Peninsula. The role of Spanish merchants in purchasing illicit goods and redistributing them throughout Cartagena and its hinterlands would provide a more nuanced understanding of how the contraband trade functioned once it left the docks – a subject which, again, is sorely missing from the present work.

In much the same way, the sources of contraband goods from within the British Empire are shrouded in obscurity in the present study. While allusions are made to the sources of supply with words like Brittany linen and Pennsylvania flour, I have provided few definitive commercial connections across the broader Atlantic world. Such connections, besides demonstrating a sort of international marketplace,¹ would serve to deepen our understanding of imperial complicity in the contraband trade. Did Brittany

¹ Which has been done quite successfully by a wide range of Atlantic world historians, not the least of which is historian David Hancock's *Citizens of the World*.

linen merchants know the destination of their shipments or was such commercial planning solely the responsibility of Jamaican interlopers? If they did know that their products were destined for Spanish American consumers, did that knowledge alter what they sent? How strong was the understanding of consumer taste in Spanish America amongst British merchants? These questions, while not broached in the present study, are fundamental to understanding the broader, interimperial marketplace which I have only dimly alluded to in the previous pages.

For the most part, this work relies heavily on the work of historians such as Lance Grahm and Colin Palmer, while simultaneously challenging their adherence to the boundaries of nation-states. Both historians' books speak to the same events and regions and, yet, relate remarkably different narratives. A fundamental challenge for this work has been to bring together these vastly different narratives without relying on traditional stereotypes repeated there. For that reason, analyzing primary sources from both empires has greatly aided this work in attempting to bridge that historiographic gap. While this work is deeply indebted to the aforementioned scholars as well as a plethora of other works cited here, it has also, hopefully, contributed to the wider historical conversation about this period. Specifically, I have sought to add to the growing number of scholars who are taking seriously the Americas as a hemispheric whole with a history which can and should be discussed together – historians such as J.H. Elliot, Felipe Fernández-Armesto, Eric Hinderaker, and Rebecca Horn to name a few. It is to the latter two to which this work, and I, owe the biggest debt.

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